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THE ESSENTIAL TAGORE

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RAMESHWAR GUPTA
M. A., Ph. D.

CHETNAGAR

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The Essential Tagore
published in 1961
by
Chetnagar
BANASTHALI
Rajasthan.

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Printed by:—
India Printers,
Kutchery Road, Ajmer.

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

I know that a reader will understand Tagore better and be nearer his inner self if he were to read the poet's own 'Chitra', 'Gitanjali', 'Balaka' or any other of his books of songs and poems than if he were to read this (or perhaps any other) book 'on' Tagore. And still I have written it, I don't know why. Is it sheer satisfaction of the ego ? May be. Or is it an endeavour on my part to understand the poet ?

I may make two things clear about this book: (1) What is contained in it is to be taken merely as a faithful account of the reaction to Tagore's poetry, of a native sensibility, not much encrusted with thinking, and yet not devoid of the historical sense. I have tried to say what happend to me when I read Tagore, which perhaps may not be very different from what may happen to anybody when he reads Tagore. Such a thing may not serve an academician; but it is not for him that this work is meant. It is rather addressed to anyone who seeks to know and feel the life and the world as Tagore knew and felt them: Feeling more than knowing. (2) Reading Tagore time and again, I have always felt a basic unity of experience or inspiration running through all his life and work, specially from the time when, stepping out of adolescence, he had once encountered his truer being. My task in the following pages has been to attempt to grasp this basic inspiration of Tagore, to know that deeper source from which all his poetry and other activities have sprung,—to feel the unique rhythm of the poet's heart-beat.

My basis is the essential and final impression left on one by Tagore's works as a whole, not by his particular, individual poems, although these too in a mysterious way breathe the fragrance of the total 'message'. My work may be dubbed as merely impressionistic, but I have taken due precaution to see that every statement that I make is borne out by Tagore's own word and spirit and by authentic 'studies'. I have given particular attention to Tagore's English works only (works freely rendered into English from the original Bengali by the poet himself and existing separately in their own right as altogether new creations) which do embody his essential spirit though not his full genius; and, to serve as textual background to my study I have included quintessential and critical summaries of the poet's dramatic and poetical works. I have, however, not included study of any of his numerous articles, essays and addresses or of his novels and short stories, although they constitute not an insignificant part of his total creative output, since the genius that inspires them is already more beautifully expressed in his poetry and drama.

In writing this work I owe gratitude to Dr. C. B. Mamoria who primarily inspired me with the idea, to my preceptor Prof. D. C. Datta, M. A. without whose blessings I could not have proceeded with the work, to my friend and colleague Prof. Rajnarain Misra who took the trouble of going through the manuscripts and suggesting improvements and finally to Swami Kumarananda, the communist, who has never been tired of singing Tagore to me.

Rameshwar Gupta

Banasthali Vidyapith,
Banasthali (Rajasthan).
June 1, 1961.

Acknowledgments

The author records his sincere thanks to the following for their kind permission to quote from their publications for the illustration of his critical views:—

* **The Trustees of Rabindranath Tagore's works and Messrs Macmillan & Co. for extracts from various works by Tagore published by them, more particularly from** ***Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore, The King of the Dark Chamber, Reminiscences,*** **and** ***Glimpses of Bengal.***

** **Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan, for extracts from "*Poems 1942.*"**

*** **Jaico Publishing House for an extract from '*Among the Great.*'**

He also gratefully acknowledges having reproduced a few lines from Prof. Thompson's ***Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist,*** **Oxford University Press, and made use of some material from** ***The Visvabharati Quarterly,*** **Shantiniketan, although he couldn't write in time for necessary permission.**

Extracts taken by him have been referred to their sources in the footnotes also. He hopes to be forgiven if per chance any extract remains unacknowledged.

CHAPTER ONE

LIFE, WORKS AND PERSONALITY

LIFE

Born on May 7, 1861, Rabindranath Tagore passed away on August 7, 1941. His eighty-year old life was one grand symphony of fire and flame, of love and delight, dedicated to the Great Unknown.

The fourteenth and youngest child of Maharshi Devendranath Thakur, the princely Brahmin landlord of the old-world Bengal on the threshold of renaissance, Rabindra lived, in affluent circumstances and literary and artistic atmosphere, a leisurely yet disciplined life, having to rise very early in the morning, take training in wrestling and gymnastics and do his lessons.

Never a regular alumnus of any school, college or university—having shaken the dust of a school from his feet after a brief experience at it and only casually having attended some other schools and a few lectures on English literature at University College, London, at the age of seventeen—he read diligently with a number of tutors at home, Sanskrit, English, Bengali, Mathematics, Science and Music. By the age of twelve he had picked up acquaintance with Madhusudan Dutt's Bengali epic *Meghnadvadha*, Kalidasa's *Meghduta* (Cloud Messenger) whose sonorous rhythm was enough for him, Jaydev's *Geet–Govind*, the sound and lilt of whose words and metres filled his child-mind with pictures of wonderful beauty, a few verses from Kalidasa's *Kumarsambhava* (The Birth the War God) which left him pining to taste the beauties of the whole, and a profusely illustrated edition of Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop* which he read without much understanding but enough to spin out a thread on which to string the illustrations. His English exercises included even translation of parts of *Macbeth* into Bengali verse. While still a boy, very frequently did he hear from his father recitations from the *Upanishadas*, himself chanted the Gayatri Hymn, 'the Vedic Mantram about the God of Light', in his enchantingly musical voice and meditated on it with great concentration. Later in his life he assiduously pored over the texts of Sanskrit lore, read Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Browne, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and Browning, besides did much other cursory reading, though he was never a voracious reader.

Having taken his dip into the literature of romance and melodrama and bearing a handsome, attractive form, he did face enticing situations in his adolescent life, but never, never was he what in the west in such contexts is implied by romantic. He was yet in his teens when once he was sent to a Marathi family in Bombay where he was to learn English before he started on his first voyage to England. There, a maiden at the age of sweet sixteen, charming and delightful, often sought out the young poet, went to him and asked and hovered round about him on no end of pleas and pretext. The poet could easily sense that something worth-happening was happening……and there were several daring advances made by the maiden, but Tagore was stone adamant. A similar incident took place on the poet's first visit to England (1877–78, at the age of seventeen) where he stayed as the guest of a doctor who had two beautiful daughters; but there too he discovered that such things did not in fact trouble him*. It is not that he did not feel the emotions; that he did, but he always maintained their chastity and holiness.

His religiousness in such matters is embodied in his own aphorism :

> The fire restrained in the tree
> Fashions flowers :
> Released from bonds it dies in ashes.

But it does not, at the same time, mean that he ever made light of the love of a woman. He says, "I have experienced again and again that every feminine love, no matter of what quality, leaves behind a legacy of flowers in our soul, a harvest of dream that would never have been born but for her showers of tenderness. Her gift of blooms may fade with time yes, but the memory of their fragrance, never."

We could sense behind these lines a strain of the Shelleyan Platonism in Tagore, but he never yet committed, like Shelley, the error of seeking in the mortal woman what was immortal, or, like Goethe, made much of the principle of the Eternal Feminine. In his life and in his poetry he had in fact passed beyond them into the sure experience of the

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* Based on Dilipkumar Roy's report in his fascinating book, *Among the Great,* Jaico Publishing House.

'Shantam-Shivam-Advaitam', Peace-Goodness-Oneness. Further, although God gazed on him often through the be-dimmed eyes of a woman, it was for him nothing else but God; it was not lust, nor fancy, nor hallucination. His love in full purity and steadfastness was centred in Mrinalini, 'a simple unsophisticated girl of little formal education' whom he had married in 1883, at the age of 22 and from whom he had two sons and three daughters. But unfortunately she couldn't keep long company and passed away in 1902 when Tagore, having arrived at the age of 41, was in the full bloom of his genius. He never remarried.

From the age of eight to eighty Tagore's was a life of hectic literary activity, continuously pouring out a stream of poems, plays, songs, dance-dramas, short stories, novels, essays, letters, and critical reviews. Around the turn of the century his most outstanding works were produced, when also were laid the foundations of his Shantiniketan school (Dec. 1901), which later (Dec. 1921) developed into the famous International University, Visva-Bharati, "where the whole world meets in one place," and to which was also added Sriniketan, a centre for training in village and cottage industries.

In 1912 Tagore paid a second visit to England where, to the artist Sir William Rothenstein, the poet W. B. Yeats and professors and critics of English literature Stopford Brooke and A. C. Bradley, his own English translations of some of his poems from *Gitanjali* were shown, which startled them; Rothenstein exclaiming that they were the most wonderful things he had ever seen, and Bradley saying that he had never expected to find a real poet. The real poet, after all, was found and he was subsequently awarded, in 1913, the Nobel Prize for Literature, in recognition of which the University of Calcutta conferred D. Litt. on him and the Government of India knighted him. But when the Jalianwala·Bag massacre (1919) occurred he showed the patriotic fervour to ·hurl his knighthood back into the face of the then Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, saying that in that humiliating context that badge of honour had made his shame glaring. Actuated essentially by his longing to see the wide wonderful world—he had once planned to tour India by the leisurely medium of bullock-cart—he embarked in 1922 upon a programme of foreign tours which intermittently continued up to 1937. He visited England, America, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Canada, Russia (where whichever way he looked he was struck with the 'marvellous progress' that had been made, the 'miracle' that had been achieved) and South America in the West and China, Japan, Persia, Malaya, Java, Bali and Siam in the east—almost all countries except Australia, New Zealand, and Africa (Egypt excluded). He met people like W. B. Yeats, Sir William Rothenstein, G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, John Masefield, Bertrand Russell, George William Russell (A. E.), Struge Moore, Ezra Pound, Stopford Brooke and Prof. Gilbert Murray in England; Romain Rolland, Countess de Noailles (the poetess), Paul Valery, Prof. Silvain Levy, Henry Bergson and Andre Gide in France; Mussolini and Benedetto Croce in Italy; Professors V. Lesny and M. Winternitze, the eminent Indologists, in Czechoslovakia; the great Chinese scholars Dr. Hu Shih and Dr. Sian Chi Chao; the Japanese poet Noguchi and the world scientist Einstein. Wherever he went he lectured to learned academies and crowded audiences, and everywhere received the honour and obeisance due to a world teacher and poet. The University of Oxford made him Doctor of Literature in 1940.

His zeal for life never abating he started, when he was nearing seventy, learning painting, and his natural creative impulse produced work— about 2000 pictures — which won recognition of connoisseurs in both East and West. During the last years of his life the plight of his beloved country and the sight of nations engaged in the cruel game of homicide filled his heart with anguish, but he never forsook faith in humanity.

Crowned with glory, he passed away on August 7, 1941, at the ripe old age of 80, survived by only one son, Rathindranath Tagore, who had been born in 1888, was for some years the Vice-Chancellor of the Visva-Bharati University and is now (1960) leading* a retired,childless life at Dehradun:

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*Passed away on June 2, 1961 leaving no issue behind.

Inscrutable Nature! But the poet has bequeathed to the world his immortal poetry.

Death had been an experience to the poet. Six months before it came, the poet had apprehended it and written:

> Momently I feel
> The time comes near for me to leave.*

Under the stress of the realization that he shall after all have to bid farewell and cross the bar Tagore, during those last months of grave physical ailment and occasional relief, goes through life's deepest experiences, awakening sometimes with the hope that there is before and after and 'the world is not a dream', and at others gaping with questioning eyes into the vast deep as into nothingness but receiving no answer, feeling at moments that the 'Jivandevata' he had worshipped throughout his life was only a Guileful One, an illusion, and yet at the same time seeming to win truth in his inner heart. Be that as it may. Tagore was a songster confiding, if to none else, at least to his Songs his inmost hopes and fears. He continues to sing till his last and having sung his final song:

> Your creation's path you have covered
> with a varied net of wiles,
> Thou Guileful One.
> False belief's snare you have
> laid with skilful hands
> in simple lives.

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* From the poem written on February 13, 1941, and published in *Poems*, Visva-Bharati.

With this deceit have you left a mark
on Greatness;
for him kept no secret night.
The path that is shown to him
by your star
is the path of his own heart
ever lucid,
which his simple faith
makes eternally shine.
Crooked outside yet it is straight within,
in this is his pride.
Futile he is called by men.
Truth he wins
in his inner heart washed
with his own light.
Nothing can deceive him,
the last reward he carries
to his treasure-house.
He who has easefully borne your wile
gets from your hands
the unwasting right to peace—*

he lays his harp at the feet of the Great Unknown: The Pilgrim starts on his journey across the silent, awesome, shoreless sea, with never a soul in the world knowing of this pilgrimage— only "Thou and I."

BACKGROUND

During his life of eighty years Tagore had seen old-time India passing from an age of hackney-carriages to the age of railway trains, motor cars and planes;

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* Tagore's last poem, composed on July 30, 1941, a week before his death. English version quoted from *Poems*, Visva-Bharati.

from an age of castor-oil lamps to that of Kerosene oil lanterns and gas and electric light; and from an age of the street games of marble-shooting, top-spinning and kite-flying to that of football, cricket and hockey. He had seen the indigenous 'madarsas' and 'chatshalas' merging into the Englished schools and colleges, and the veiled Indian women stepping out of the narrow four walls of their houses into the wider world. He was in the thick of a renascent India to which his contribution was as rich and varied as Leonardo da Vinci's was to Italy and which was coming into a serious cultural clash with the west and groping for a way out. He had known the Arya–Samaj founded in north India in 1875 trying to revive Vedic culture in its pristine purity; the Brahma-Samaj started in Bengal in 1828 trying to build a bridge between Hindu spirituality and western thought; the Prarthna-Samaj in Bombay rennovating religious and social life under the inspiration of the saints and singers of Maharastra and of the rational and social spirit of the west; and the Theosophical society established in the South trying to carry eastern mysticism and spiritualism to the west. He had passed through the political upheavals of the partition of Bengal when his patriotic sonnets were sung everywhere in public meetings and processions;the Jalianwala Bagh massacre; the non-cooperation movement; Mahatma Gandhi's salt satyagrah and subsequent struggles for freedom, always keeping himself in living contact with the country's social and political aspirations. He had seen the First World-War throughout from its beginning to end, the establishment of the League of Nations, and the idea of internationalism and a united world slowly emerging; and, subsequently, he had seen Italy brazen-facedly subduing Abyssinia and the westernized Japan in alliance with Fascism and Nazism trampling under its military jackboots the innocent countries of the east. He was still living when the Second World-War was raging at the height of its horror and fury, and the western world was dis-illusioned with its own material progress and was eagerly groping for light. All these things directly or indircetly left their impression on the sensitive mind of Tagore.

NATURE'S INFLUENCES

Although born and brought up within the four walls of the Tagore family's old Calcutta house, Jorasanko (built about 1784 by his ancestors), and passing his childhood days under the complete supervision of the family servants who wouldn't let him out, he still had his early association with nature :

Through a window of one of the rooms of the Jorasanko house and through gaps in the parapets of its terraced roof he would take his peeps at the housegarden's pond, the banyan tree* and the coconut groves and at 'the ducks busy preening their feathers, the livelong day,' and gaze on and on that 'limitless thing called the outside world', with which he immediately fell in love. Or, whenever he could, he would slip away from the servants and hide himself in some little room at the top of the house where he could see the blue spaces of the sky and hear the kite calling from the far heights. Or, on early autumn morns he would retire to the small, very small, terrace garden, his paradise, to meet the scent of dewy grass and foliage. He would sense there was something undreamt of lurking everywhere, on earth, in water, foliage and the sky, which seemed to speak to him a language of poetry. Even at that early age he yearned he should somehow get into their inmost depths:

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* Immortalized in his poem "The Banyan Tree" in *The Crescent Moon.*

> He longed to be the wind and blow through the Banyan-Tree's rustling branches, to be its shadow and lengthen with the day on the water, to be a bird and perch on its topmost twig, and to float like those ducks among the weeds and shadows.*

When Tagore was twelve he was once taken by his father to Shantiniketan—'a spot of salwood and thorn-brake, the home of blazing winds, not the gentle loveliness but the grand stretch of space.' To live in such a tranquil place was to deepen day by day the peace of one's heart. It was here that Tagore had his first direct and intimate contact and his first free-play with nature. What here impressed him most was the openness and boundlessness of space, 'the sun rising at the edge of the undulating expanse which stretched away to the eastern horizon.' From there the boy Tagore was taken to Dalhousie in the Himalayas where he roamed freely among the pine woods, and at night while he sat under the stars receiving lessons in Astronomy from his father, he simply 'marvelled at the poetry and mystery of the depths of space.'

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*Adapted from the poem "The Banyan Tree."

At the age of twenty four when he took charge of the ancestral state he went to live at Sheildah, his country home by the side of the Padma (a current of the Ganges) and within easy reach of Calcutta. In a letter written in 1932 he records, "When I came face to face with Nature in the villages of Bengal my days overflowed with happiness." At his country home he came in direct living contact with the people of the soil and the natural scenery of green, riverine Bengal. Here, he received the poet's welcome from

> 'the river Padma and the morning star through the intervals of bamboo leaves on her bank'.*

Here, his eyes followed

> 'the track of noisy girls
> to the river
> along the shady village lane
> and enjoyed the duet of colours under
> the sunset sky
> in the blossoming field of mustard
> and linseed sown together.'*

Here, many an hour he passed in a jolly boat anchored in midstream, lying facing the sky in 'a lazy, dreamy, self-absorbed, sky-filled state of mind', and taking in those impressions 'which are the landscapes of his verses'. He had gazed on all this subliming beauty and said, "I love it." Tagore's Nature is never alone: It is always peopled with men while his men always dwell in Nature. A sense of affinity, a joy, is always flowing from one to the other: All mingle in the creative dance of the One. I am inclined to think that Tagore minus the Bengal's green, riverine scenery and its ryot, ferryman, mendicant and singer could no longer remain a great poet.

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* *Poems*, Visva-Bharati.

LITERARY INFLUENCES

The one thing that Tagore constantly carried with himself was the scent and colour of the fields and forests of the land of his birth—Bharatvarsha, and the spirit of its hoary civilization embedded in the hearts of the unsophisticated sons of its soil and embodied in their literature, the Vedas and the Upanishadas and in their festival songs and hymns. His mind was saturated with the light of the Vedant and the quintessence of the Upanishadas, and his heart with the sweetness of the Vaishnava ideal of Radha's love for her divine Lord. He was also strongly susceptible to the effusions of medieval mystic saints like Kabir, Nanak, Dadu and Razzab to whose works he had been introduced by Acharya Kshitimohan Sen, susceptibe as well to the songs of the Baul singers of Bengal, the spirit of Buddhism and the universal humanism of the modern age.

He was deeply steeped in the literary traditions of his country. Sanşkrit poetry gave him its sonorous cadence of metres and a sound body of art; Kalidasa influenced him for his love of nature and pure aestheticism; the medieval poet-singers gave him images startling and new; the artless flute strains of the lyrics of the Bengali poet Biharilal Chakravarty, then living, awoke within him, when he was only fifteen, 'the music of fields and forest glades'.

The west too entered his life deeply. His grandfather was the first man to visit Europe from Bengal in modern times; his father was the first disciple of Raja Rammohan Roy, the westernised Hindu; Tagore himself too had undertaken several visits to England and other European countries, one of which was only when he was at the impressionable age of seventeen; and then there was the historically inevitable impact of the west on the east. As a result of this all, Tagore assimilated the spirit of the west in its fulness, although essentially he always remained rooted in the ancient wisdom of the east. Science, especially astronomy, gave him many of the majestic pictures of the world which fill his poetry. And then, philosophers Kant, Hegel, Bergson and Russell and evolutionists Darwin, Lamarck, Spencer and Stephen, and poets Shakespeare, Goethe, Victor Hugo and the English Romantics, more particularly Keats and Shelley (Tagore in his early twenties was called the Shelley of Bengal), and the Victorians Robert Browning, Tennyson and Mathew Arnold, and the American poets Whitman and

Emerson, and the rhythmic, inspired prose of Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*—all had their share of influence on him. It is very likely that Tagore had discovered in the Romantics an instance of a new spirit creating for itself new poetic forms, metres, cadences and rhythms which must have inspired him to do likewise in his own language; but, basically it was a phenomenon of the natural blossoming forth of the poet's own spirit. Poets indeed are like gentlemen with their hands in each other's pockets: they may even have likeness of perceptions and feelings, and still, each great one is different from the other by the difference in forms which each one's own genius is creating. The beauty of the spirit is not in its inner oneness but in its manifestation in infinitely varied forms and colours.

WORKS

Tagore's creative genius is multi-splendoured. In addition to his poetry in which he is supreme, his writings include a large number of short stories, novels, dramas, essays and critical reviews, in which genres too he can be counted among the world's leading masters. I have, however, confined my attention to his drama and poetry alone.

Tagore had started lisping in numbers when he was only eight, because even at that age speech would take a rhythmic form in him. The first record of his verse that is available is however only of the age of 11–12, after which there is a continuous flow of poetry. He had written more than seven thousand verses before he was seventeen and accumulated no fewer than three hundred thousand before he died.

The entire period of his creative activity can roughly be divided into five stages, each with its own distinguishable features but none organically separable from the other. It is, infact, one continuous stream of verse and music varying at its different stages only in rhythm and depth. All his poems are lyrical and his dramas poetic. He had no genius for epic. "I had a mind", he once worte, "to enter the lists for the composition of an epic poem, but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into a thousand songs." Although he wrote no epic, his poems and songs, over three thousand, embodying every nuance of human feeling and every stir and throb of Nature make between themselves verily an epic of the heart of Existence.

Originally all his work is in his own mother tongue, Bengali, some of which is later translated (not literally but essentially) into English by the poet himself. Only his published dramatic and poetical works are listed below. Bengali names of the works are followed by their English equivalents, shown within brackets with the year of the publication of the original in each case. The English name does not imply that the work as such is available in English. His works rendered into English by himself, and which won him world-renown are listed separately.

I. Juvenile Poetry (before the age of 20)

Kavi-Kahini (A Poet's Story)— a fragment of 1185 lines first published in 1877 when the poet was only sixteen, in the Bengali periodical *Bharati,* a paper started by Tagore's own elder brother. *Bhanu Singher Padavali* (Songs of Bhanu Singh) in imitation of the style of the vaishnava poets, written under the pen name Bhanu Singh, first published in 1877 in the periodical named above. Surprisingly enough a scholar presented these songs as the work of a newly discovered medieval Maithili poet and got Ph.D. from a German University. *Bhagna Hridaya* (Broken Heart)— a verse narrative melodramatic in character, written during the Poet's first stay in England, 1877–1878, at the age of seventeen. *Valmikir Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki) — a musical drama bearing English and Irish melodies written after the poet's return from England in 1880; and finally, *The Fateful Hunt* (1880) a musical play. A selection of his earliest verses was published in 1881 under the title *Saisab Sangit*—Songs of Childhood.

Writing verse at this time was simply for the fun of it and also to imitate what he saw his own elder brothers and others doing around him in the Jorasanko House. His work at this stage is characterised by the imitation of the metrical forms, figures of speech and conceits of the ancients. It is merely an adolescent heart's wilderness out of which come vague miseries and sentiments which do not touch any genuine depth and are not produced from any genuine consciousness of poetry. But one cannot say that this work had absolutely no ring of poetry in it. The poet was still in his teens when, one evening at Dalhousie in the Himalayas, his father asked him to sing hymns of his (the son's) own composition. When the young boy had finished, the father said, " If the king of the country had known the language and could appreciate its literature he would doubtless have rewarded the poet," —— a prophecy full well fulfilled.

II. Works of Early Youth—1881-1889 (Age about 21-30)

Poems— *Sandhya–Sangeet* (Evening Songs, 1881), *Prabhat Sangeet* (Morning Songs , 1884) , *Chhabi–o–Gaan* (Pictures and Songs, 1884), *Kari–o–Komal* (Sharps and Flats, 1885 , including the poet's translations of certain poems of Shelley, Mrs. Browning, C. Rossetti and Victor Hugo), *Mayarkhela* (The Play of Illusion, 1888).

Plays— *Prakritir Pratishodh* (Nature's Revenge, 1885), the poet's first important drama.

The first flashes are still from the plane of youthful thought, fancy and dream with no depth of feeling. But then on a morning of 1888 when the poet was 21, a significant incident occurs in his life : he has a tremendous mystical experienc (described in chapter II) which is immediate followed by a poetic outburst : "Awakening of the Waterfall", the first poem of his *Morning Songs.*

> 'And I—I will pour of compassion a river,
> The prisons of stones I will break, will deliver;
> I will flood the earth, and, with rapture mad
> Pour music glad.'*

It was the first throwing forth of his innerself outwards, a vision of the wonder of ordinary things the effect of which remained throughout his life. *The Morning Songs* was followed by a play, *Nature's Revenge* (The Sanyasi) embodying his experience : 'The finite is the true infinite', which basically expresses the message of his vision. It was a subject on which all his writings have dwelt. This was the beginning of his existential experience which only deepened and became more compact and coherent in the succeeding epochs. The basic thing had been gained and there was practically no new type of development thereafter.

III. Works of Mature Youth—1890-1900 (Age about 30-40)

Poems— *Manasi* (The Dream Image, 1890) ; *Sonartari* (The Golden Boat, 1894); *Chitra* (1896) *Chaitali* (April Harvest, 1896); *Katha-o-Kahini* (Stories and Legends, 1899) — containing besides narrative poems, five small musical dramas— Gandhari's Prayer, A Sojourn in Hell, Karna and Kunti, Sati, Lakshmi's Test); *Kalpana* (Imaginings, 1900); *Kshanika* (Moments, 1900).

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* From Prof. Thompson : *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist.*

Plays—*Raja-o - Rani* (King and Queen, 1899); *Bisarjan* (Sacrifice, 1890); *Chitrangda* (Chitra, 1892); *Malini* (1897); and then three social comedies–*Vaikuntha Nath's Manuscript*, *Radically Wrong*, and *The Bachelor's Club*, written during 1897-99.

Despite his mystical experience referred to above, the sense of Infinity had not still made its stable home in the poet's psyche. Of his work done before thirty Tagore himself had written, "it still feels brimful of luscious frivolity, with not a trace of philosophy." But now comes the stage which marks the beginning of the poet's real and genuine self-expression and he realises that the purpose of his poetry should be the expression of the throbbing pulsation of the heart which was but a vibration of the divine music. '*Manasi*' marks his definite attainment of poetic maturiry. In a masterly style '*The Golden Boat*' embodies the poet's apprehension of the 'Jeevandevata', the 'Life's Deity', the 'Life's Beloved', an experience which finds intenser expression in '*Chitra*', of which the three poems—'Farewell to Heaven', 'Night of Full Moon', and 'Urvasi' are the hightest poetic achievements of the first half of Tagore's life. Never again was he to attain in his poetic career the purity of naturalistic poerty that is found here.

IV. Works of Full Maturity—1901-1916 (Age 40-55)

Poems—*Naivedya* (Offering, 1901); *Utsarg* (Dedication, 1904); *Smarna* (In Memoriam, 1903); *Sisu*, (The Child, 1903); *Kheya* (Crossing, 1906); *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings, 1910); *Gitimalya* (Song Garland—songs written between 1908-14 though first published in 1920);

CIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIO
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Gitali (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), and finally *Balaka* (A Flight of Cranes, 1916)—one of the highest peaks of his poetry, grappling with the fundamental problem of 'Becoming' and lyrically singing the refrain that change and movement is the basis of Reality : 'The Cranes ever on the wing and ever crackling: 'Not here, not here ! somewhere else—to some other region.'

Plays:—*Sardotsav* (Autumn Festival, 1908);*Atonement* (1909);*Raja* (King of the Dark Chamber, 1910); *Dakghar* (The Post Office, 1916); *Achalayatan* (1916); *Phalguni* (The Cycle of Spring, 1916)—all symbolical plays.

His previous experiences take on a symbolic form and attain to religious depth; his realisation that the Timeless and the Infinite 'manifested itself into the finite and temporal and through the finite and temporal form returned into Itself,' becomes the central inspiration of his life and work. The poems of this period enshrine some of the most religiously felt experiences of the deeper life of man and of the universe. '*Naivedya*' marks the passing from the naturalistic to religious poetry, while *Gitanjali*, *Gitimalya* and *Gitali*, in the thick of devotional air, put forth songs that seem to issue from the very depths of being as offerings of love to some deep, hidden-behind-the-cosmic mask, ineffable Person.

V. Works of the last Phase—1917-1941 (Age 56-80)

Poems—*Palataka* (The Runaway, 1918); *Lipika* (Letters, 1922); *Pravahini*(1925); *Puravi* (1925); *Mahuva* (1929); *Parisesh* (1932); *Punascha* (1932); *Sesh Saptak* (The Last Diapason, (1935); *Prantic* (1938), and his last works *Rogasajyaya*, *Arogya*(Recovery) and *Sesh Lekha*—all 1941.

Plays—*Muktadhara* (The Waterfall,1922),*Natir Puja* (The Dancing Girl's worship, 1927).

The poet has not ceased to grow. This last phase shows an orientation towards the more concrete side of reality,—the poet seeing man and things existing as objective facts conditioned by 'History' and picking up scenes and incidents that come up before him in actual life; although, at the same time, the basic sense of the deeper reality is never lost, the poignant longing ever to feel the touch of life-spirit and to be truly able to say to it

> You are beautiful,
> I love you

never leaves him, and the art that gives impression of beauty is never abandoned. Shorn of all extraneous decoration and conceit, the poet has arrived at wonderful directness and simplicity in technique. A few word patches simply raising a picture or making a statement with no seeming motive confront us unawares with the face of Beauty. He sees and talks of the youngman collecting somehow, by the drudgery of private tuition, half a meal a day; sees and talks of the weary steps of the village schoolmaster worth three rupees a month, the upcountryman with shrunken cheeks owing a harassing debt to a man from Peshawar, the grizzly old tanner working at camel's saddle, the poor santhal woman's dignity soiled by the market price, the distant whistle of the passing train, the ding-dong of the bell from the neighbouring school, the black man rising up in arms against the mailed-booted whites and the savagery of the war which he, the poet, had apprehended with prophetic insight. Also many a poem of his declining years betrays the sad but inevitable feeling of a man seeming to lose attachment with existence and yet striving to hold to it; reveals through blackness of negation the flicker of a mind standing up and saying 'I am full.' And last of all he sings of his encounter with death, ending in the realization that 'in the ocean of Rest, the wave of Movement doth merge.'

ENGLISH WORKS.

Out of his Bengali works was gleaned the grain that the poet himself turned into English in his own inimitable style as he alone of a subtle creative sensibility could do, if the soul and something of the music of the original was to be recreated. Really, the rendering was always of the experience rather than of the language,— so free and spontaneous a rendering that the so called translated work is a new creation in itself, existing separately in its own right, and rarely, if at all, smacking of a secondhand product.

It was only a chance mood that put him on his way to recreate his work in English; but it made his destiny; it introduced him to the world. A leading article in *The Times*, London, in 1912, on the basis of noted English poet s' admiration of Tagore's own translation of his poems, hailed him as a world poet; *The Times Literary Supplement*, reviewing *Gitanjali* within a week of its publication wrote, "They (the *Gitanjali* poems) are prophetic of poetry that might be written in England if our poets could attain to the same harmony of emotion and idea"; A. C. Bradley, the wellknown Shakespearean critic observed, "It looks as though we have at last a great poet among us again"; and Ezra Pound, the noted poet of this century, recorded; "The appearance of the poems of Rabindranath Tagore is an event in the history of English poetry and world poetry." The English work accidentally commenced thus:

After the exciting celebrations of his fiftieth birthday in 1912, the poet retired for a short rest to his quiet country house on river Padma at Sheildah, where with no other motive but to while away his time he started translating some of his poems into English, which he continued during his voyage to England the same year. The result was the English *Gitanjali* which made him the Nobel Laureate and compelled the westerner, for whom East, till then, was simply Kipling's East of magic and snakes, to know what the easterner, after all, had written to deserve the world's highest prize. Other works followed, which in their turn were translated into other European languages by scholars. His English works, mostly, though not entirely, translated by himself and so far published are:

Poems— *Gitanjali* (1912), *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), *Stray Birds* (1916), *Lover's Gift* (1918), *Crossing* (1918), *The Fugitive, and other Poems* (1921), *Fireflies* (1928),* *Poems* (1942)—an anthology containing poems representative of various epochs of his poetic career, and including his last poems. †

Plays— *Chitra* (1913), *The Post Office* (1914), *The Cycle of Spring* (1917), *Sacrifice, and other Plays*— Sacrifice, Malini, Sanyasi, The King and the Queen, Karna and Kunti— (1917), *The Waterfall* (1922), *Red Oleanders* (1923). ×

Lectures and Essays—Directly written in English, and published are: *Sadhana* (Lectures delivered at Harvard University 1914), *Personality* (Lectures delivered in America, 1917), *Creative Unity* (1922), *The Religion of Man* (Hibbert Lectures at Oxford University, 1930), *Nationalism* (Lectures delivered in America and Japan, 1917), *Man* (Lectures delivered at Andhra University, India, 1937), *Crisis in Civilization*— a speech written for the occasion of the celebration of his 80th birthday at Shantiniketan, April 1941,— his last message to the war-torn world.

Autobiographical—*Reminiscenes* (1917), *My Boyhood*

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* All these works published by Macmillan & Co.

† Published by Visva-Bharati.

× All published by Macmillan & Co.

Days, *Glimpses of Bengal* (1921), *Letters to a Friend* (1928).

Novels—*The Home and the World* (1919), *The Wreck* (1921), *Gora* (1924).

Short-Story Collections— *Hungry stones* (1916), *Broken Ties* (1916), *Mashi and other stories* (1918), *The Parrot's Training* (1918).

This work in the English language, although forming only a small portion of the totality of the poet's work, contains the essential Tagore and has assumed under the poet's shaping spirit an individuality, charm and wholeness of its own. *

PERSONALITY

When young, Tagore was fair, tall and slender and in lineaments as in spirit he looked every inch a poet. At an advanced age, with his silver locks and flowing beard and wonderful eyes he gave the impression of an ancient Rishi emerged from sylvan hermitages. While a poet in the West, Ezra Pound, gazing on him found his face 'hallowed with mystery and oriental ambiguity', the crowds of people there, among whom he walked in orange-tinged flowing robes looked on him as if their very Prophet had reappeared. Very few poets of the world have enjoyed such beauty, majesty and ineffable charm of form. Add to this his musical voice in which he recited his poems, the incandescence which illuminated his talks and sometimes a flicker of the Infinite in the glow of his eyes, and you have Tagore — a fascinating, elevating, incomprehensible being. A Chinese Professor records, "Whenever I saw him, I always felt a kind of divine light mingled with love, mercy, bliss and joy, pouring out from him upon me." *

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* Translations of his other works by various scholars are coming out from time to time. For Example: *Sheaves*, a few of his select poems not appeared in translation till 1950, by Nagendranath Gupta, Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay, 1950. *Syamali*, some of the poems written by the poet during 1936, by Sheila Chatterjee, Visva-Bharati,1955 *The Golden Boat*, by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Jaico, Bombay *Farewell My Friend* and *The Garden*, by K. R. Kriplani, Jaico, Bombay. *A Flight of Swans* (poems from Balaka), *The Herald of Spring* (Tagore's love poems), *Wings of Death* (a selection of Tagore's last poems), all the three by Aurobindo Bose, John Murray, London.

He rises very early in the morning, sits for meditation for sometime and then takes to his pen. His usual fare is :

> "At the right time each morning I have two mangoes, then rice for mid-day lunch, two more mangoes in the afternoon and hot 'luchis' and fried things at night—simple and regular meals so that one feels hungry and can enjoy them, and there need be no frequent calls for medicines," †

He is tenderly affectionate in his personal life, of which his letters to his wife are a mirror. In one, penned in 1890 from aboard the ship bound for England he writes :

> "On Sunday night I felt my soul leave my body and go to Jorasanko (his house in Calcutta). You were lying on the edge

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* Prof. Tan Yun Shan in "Gurudev Tagore", Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay, 1946, p. 4.

† In a letter to his wife from Sheildah in 1901

> of the big bed, Bela and Baby by your right. I caressed you a little and said, 'Little Wife !' remember that I left my body on Sunday and came to see you—when I get back from Europe I shall ask you whether you saw me ...... Now-a-days I always feel that there is no place like home. After I return this time I shall not stir out again."

He would do everything in his power to provide, as a matter of duty, the healthiest and happiest environment for the growth and development of his children, but would not fret if he saw them moving away from the ideal he personally liked, because he held that every seed would grow in its own unique, individual way; our duty was simply to provide the best of environment. Touching on this point and just giving us to see as to how deeply holy he held the relation between man and woman, he wrote to his wife (1901)—

> "Of late it has become the cnly desire of my soul that our lives may be easy and straight-forward;........... our ideals high; our efforts selfless; and that our country's needs may be of more importance than our own. Even though our children move away from this ideal, may you and I remain, to the very end, the support of each other's humanity and the refuge of each other's world-weary soul, and so bring our lives to a beautiful conclusion."*

He never assumed superior airs. To all his correspondents who included children and young and old men and women he wrote letters in his own hand and never refused to receive anybody who went to see him—previous appointment was not necessary. He would talk with a visitor as long as the latter wished, putting his pen away if he was engrossed in writing. Although an all-round aristocrat—aristocrat by birth, status, culture and wealth—he recognised nothing that would discourage him from dipping into the collective—the poor, the low and the illiterate. In his presence all tension of distinction would vanish for he could smile at himself and let others smile at his own cost. This largeness in him was not from any democratic or humanistic sentiment but it came directly from his realisation that a longing for sympathy burns equally in all. And this realisation was given to him not by the sophisticated wise and the rich but by his own beloved Bengal's poor peasants, ferrymen and street singers. He had seen a meek and radically simple soul shining through their worn and wrinkled bodies, had exclaimed with the realisation, "How much greater than I are they ?" and had prayed:

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* From a letter to his wife written in 1901.

> Set me not higher than others,
> Keep me not apart from all else.
> Draw me down into a sweet lowliness
> Let my garment be red with the
> common dust you touch with your feet.†

He held the self dignity of every human being in the highest esteem and would say to the insulted and the oppressed of the world: demand equality and freedom; to achieve it, fight in fury if need be; for he deplored man being weak, indolent, poor and timid. He never liked his countrymen making petitions to the rulers for crumbs of food or for the gift of freedom. The sight of any man being obsequious to another man simply exasperated him. To him there was nothing more dehumanising than the mentality that seeks favour and kindness and nothing more demeaning than charity made from a feeling of superiority. "Nothing permanent," he once wrote, "can be built up on charity——only from equals can one expect real help."

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† Poems, Visva-Bharati, Song 41.

Always bold and outspoken in his life, he felt no fear in expressing his difference of opinion even with Mahatma Gandhi when the latter said that he could bring swaraj with charkha; the rationalist in him blazed forth again when Gandhiji instead of looking at the terrible Bihar earthquake as a natural calamity said that it was due to the ill-treatment of the untouchables by the caste Hindus, and blamed him for abetting rather than checking the tendency of his countrymen to ignore reason; similarly he didn't fail to give a piece of his mind to the Japanese poet, Yone Noguchi, when (1938) he wanted Tagore's blessing upon Japan's career of brazen aggression; and to dispatch a right-spirited reply——that masterpiece of malediction——to Miss Rathbon's letter which sought to defame the Indian nation.

His heart would flare up at anything that would subdue, repress or insult life, whether it was poverty, custom, tradition, dogma, authority or religion. When he looked at the accumulating dirt-heap of tradition and of old out-moded ideas in his country he felt no compunction in exclaiming——it was two years before he died—that "he would welcome even a wave of atheism over India, for it would act like a forest fire that sweeps away dead stuff and rubbish";* and, although spoken in jest he did mean the thing when the same year (1939) he said that "he was sorry he would not live to see the Soviet Union conquer India, for it was the only Power which would drop a bomb impartially on those two symbolically contiguous buildings, the Moslem mosque and the temple of Jagannath at Puri !"‡

Now another side. Never a narrow puritan, he would embrace what a Mahatma would spurn. In fact all that goes to fulfil life is Tagore's. In his zest for life he knew no inhibitions, no timid exclusions. He found nourishment in abandoning himself to anything pleasant that came his way. "I grasp", Montaigne had said, "the least possibilities of pleasure which I can have." And really on occasions of pleasure Tagore, like Montaigne, could tear into shreds, for the nonce, the badge of the civil and staid, and sing

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* Quoted from Thompson : *Tagore, the poet ond Dramatist, P. 281.*

‡ Ibid.

> "O, Mad, superbly drunk,......
> If you
> Reck not rhyme or reason;...
> Then I will follow you, comrade, and
> be drunken and go to the dogs......
> For I know 'tis the height of wisdom
> to be drunken and go to the dogs......
> I will take the holy vow to be worthless
> to be drunken and go to the dogs."

The Poet in " A Poet's Testament" confesses,

> "I have completed seventy years of my life but even now my friends complain of the trait of frivolity which interferes with the gravity becoming to an old age. .... I am afraid I cannot afford to be more serious: Those who want to place me on a high pedestal, with the ringing of the bells and sounding of conch-shells, to them I would say I have been born in a lower rung......I am a poet and nothing else."

There was in him an uncanny longing to be in the heart of the world and to taste and smell it, and frolic in it freely. What makes him dear to us is his sense of intimacy with the most ordinary things of life; what beamed on his face time and again was the joy he felt in human life, in nature and in the world around:

> "I am drunken with the sight of this all,"

he had once cried. This was no light pleasantry but an inner poetic sense that took away the world heart's ache. Life, its fullest broadening out, fullest utilization in work congenial to one's being and its fullest enjoyment by the utmost deepening of awareness,—anything that helped life to this end—abundance, colour, gaiety, openness of mind and bountifulness of heart—was for Tagore the highest and holiest of religion, and anything that baulked it, the greatest crime. If penury and 'contraction' were the rule, God, he held, would never have blossomed out into world. His own personality corresponded to the vastness and richness of human and natural life. Were an alternative offered him—either be a contemplative, retire from the world and gain God or go to the house where there are song and dance and lose God, he would choose the latter. Not because he was an epicurean but because he knew by personal experience whose validity he could not deny, that God was really to be seen in the world's colour, its music and dance, and that a God beyond and above these was a false God.

> "Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,
> nor in Yoga and renunciation."*

Similarly, if he were given to be the king of the whole world with all but the right to indulge in creative self-expression—to make poetry and song—he would not accept it because he knew that greater than the kingship of the whole world was life's essential truth and delight which, as he found, consisted in self-creative activity. And that is what made of Tagore a poet: he gave himself easily and gladly to the compelling force of his native propensity to compose and make poetry;—resisting that, he could have been another Gandhi; but then the world would have been poorer. The world is happy that he went his own way tripping on the earth and conversing with the heavens and celebrating in his songs the wedding of the two. Engaged in his creative activity, he wouldn't lose contact with the current of world-events and with the modern man's enigmas and miseries. No heart suffered a greater anguish than his at the way things were moving in the world; he suffered, besides, not a few personal sorrows including financial worries, but he bore them all inwardly with a patience and forbearance that was not only uncommon but godly. Those who have heard his sermons which he often delivered to his students under the greenwood tree at Shantiniketan report that sometimes his eyes would seem to gaze on some distant object and he would seem to speak from a state of trance. One cannot say that he had not seen the Light. Infact, in his life Tagore had been through what are called mystical experiences when, lifted above the plane of common existence, he would suddenly be transported into a state of awareness in which he would vision the world in a different light, as if his whole being were streaming out of its centre to embrace all existence. These experiences had become a real, organic part of his life and had established him in the living faith of a 'Super-feeling' or 'Super-love' as the first cause and end of Creation. Above all he made that faith beautifully articulate.

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* Tagore : *Poems of Kabir.*

How is it that all men do not have such experience and speech ? Perhaps because all men are not able to inherit or cultivate such 'deeper' sensibility and feeling—are not geniuses. Tagore shines in varied hues of a versatile genius. He shines as poet—the creative artist, as mystic and yet a man of deep attachments, as musician, painter, patriot, philosopher and educationist and even as diagnosist and physician of the modern world's maladies. But one may see that in him the poet-mystic is always central and supreme. Examine anything that he did—his Visvabharati, his social, political and religious activities, his talks, lectures and essays, his tirade against selfish nationalism and impersonal mechanism—nothing could break away from the poet-mystic in him; everything should be drenched in the light of his art and of his unique experience

"thy living touch is upon all my limbs."

CHAPTER TWO

POETICO-MYSTICAL SENSIBILITY

In Tagore poetical sensibility merges into mystical sensibility. One is rarely distinguishable from the other. Mystical sensibility for me, as I have seen it in Tagore and in all the great poets I have known, simply implies direct awareness of the soul of existence. It is a sudden and swift imprint on your heart of the simple fact of an object (or a scene) existing in its own right as a great truth. In the intensity of that sudden impress—in that flash—the object or the scene dissolves in your own being: or, which is the same thing, you enter into the being of the object. It is the phenomenon of a heightened and intensified awareness, a transformed or qualitatively changed mind, of a sudden illumination when 'we see into the life of things'—into the truth subsisting in the heart of the universe; when all sense of pettiness is transcended and life becomes an awareness of greatness and glory, and the world the splendrous opening of a flower. Call it then what you will—poetic or mystic experience. Tagore in his life did undergo such experiences. There is evidence for it. The poet himself provides it.

One morning in 1882 as he was watching, from a verandah of his house on Sudder Street in Calcutta, the sun rise from behind the trees, "all of a sudden", he records,

> "a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light."

That very day the poem, "The Awakening of the Waterfall" gushed forth coursing on like a veritable cascade bearing the poet's ecstatic shout :

> "My heart has opened out today,
> The world comes close and whispers to me"

"And", he further records,

> "it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing," and, "As I would stand on the balcony, the gait, the figure, the features of each one of the passers-by, whoever they might be, seemed to me all so extraordinarily wonderful as they flowed past,—waves on the sea of the universe. From infancy I had seen only with my eyes, I now began to see with the whole of my consciousness. I could not look upon the sight of two smiling youths, nonchalantly going their way, the arm of one on the other's shoulder, as a matter of small moment; for through it I could see the fathomless depth of the e~~x~~ternal spring of joy, from which numberless sprays of laughter leap throughout the world."*

Things and movements had laid themselves bare in their essential reality before the poet's eye;

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* Tagore: *Reminiscences.*

it was as if the poet had 'seen' God. The little point of consciousness in him had made contact with the supertotality of existence. This experience received at the age of 21 ever after remained a great 'Affirmation' with the poet, and a fount of his energy and creative inspiration. The poet records yet another mystical experience which he had another morning in Freer School Lane, Calcutta :

> "I seem to witness, in the wholeness of my vision, the movements of the body of whole humanity, and to feel the beat of the music and the rhythm of the mystic dance."

And yet another : It was a June evening in 1923 in the garden of King's College at Cambridge, when Tagore and Bertrand Russell met; Russell talked, and Tagore sang and gradually sank into a strange state of being. The next day he reported :

> "The truth is that in that hallowed enclosure, I quickly passed into the second state of consciousness, and experienced absorbing apprehensions."†

On the strength of such experiences once he averred that there was a direct, revelatory or intuitive way of arriving at the heart of things, and wrote :

> "The road which leads to knowledge without going through the dreary process of understanding, that is the real road. If that is barred, though the world's marketing may yet go as usual, the open sea and the mountain top cease to be possible of access."

In a letter written from Bolepur when he was 31, the poet discloses the sort of hypnotised mood of the body he sank into when he was engaged in composing a poem—

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† Aronson : *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes.*

> "A smile playing over my lips, my eyes half closed, my head swinging to the rhythm, the thing I hummed gradually taking shape."*

Not the sort of terrifying movement of Kublakhan's poet—'his floating hair, his flashing eyes', and yet bearing essentially something of the same ecstatic creativity.

Teasing the poet out of customary sensibility, there are some more spells of suprarational experiences on record which begot some particular poems. The poet accounts for the composition of his poem "The Stream of Being", the greatest poem in his book *Balaka*, thus :

> "I was in Allahabad, at my nephew's house. I used to have a very quiet time there, in the evening sitting on the terrace. One day, I felt the restfulness of the scene, and everything around me. It was a dark evening, and suddenly there came on me the feeling, there is flowing, rushing all round me—that invincible rush of creation—the star flecks of foam. I could feel the flow of the dark evening, with all the stars shining; and that current of eternity touched me very deeply. I felt in the heart of it. So I began to write. And when I started writing, one thing leads to the next. That was the beginning of *Balaka*—the sweep of this impalpable and invincible stream."

Prof. Thompson records that in the days when Tagore wrote *The Post Office* and the *Gitanjali*, the most symbolic and mystic "and very intimately" the poet's own, he would wander in the moonlit mango-groves, and "when moonlight coincided with the phase of lyrical excitement, he would become beside himself, in a veritable ecstasy, and spend his night drifting among the trees."

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* Tagore : *Glimpses of Bengal*, p. 37.

Apart from these biographical and autobiographical recordings of his mystical experiences, the very ring and rhythm of Tagore's poetry convinces me that there had been some sort of coming and going, meeting and parting between the poet and the Supreme Person, that the poet had dips in the profundity of Existence.

From the nature of the supra-normal experiences described above as well as from the nature of his poetry as a whole, we are in a position to mark out certain things for our special observation with regard to the height and intensity of Tagore's poetico-mystic vision. First, Tagore had no direct apprehension of God in the sense that Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa or Kabir or St. Bernard or Boehme had. His life was not the life of those full-fledged mystics who, even when absorbed in the daily round of common duties, constantly feel an invisible force filling them and moving and guiding them and who can command at will a direct communion with the Divine. Tagore's life unlike Kabir's, for example, was not wholly filled with and inspired by the constant apprehension of the Divine, although he was temperamentally in tune with his (Kabir's) thought and 'vision'. In a momentary transformation of his awareness, no doubt, Tagore sometimes did apprehend "the Great", but even in such moments he never received from Him that assurance which permanently* dispels all fears and doubts, and that Light after seeing which nothing remains to be seen. Second, his life was not one of devotion in the religious sense of the term, as the life of a Vaishnav Bhakta like Surdas or Mira or a Christian devotee like St. Teresa is taken to be. Although he had a deep devotional sense which inspired many of his songs, his life's activity, after all, was not aimed like a Vaishnav Bhakta's, at the unified act of constant aspiration for God and nothing else but God. Tagore was a modern: Things other than religious devotion and divine communion troubled him,—the political slavery of his country, war and the moral crisis facing humanity.

Third, Tagore's was not the life of 'Sadhna' in the yogic sense as we would take the life of, say, Sri Aurobindo or Rousenbroeck. Never had he passed through the usual mystic stages technically spoken of as purgation, illumination or ecstasy, nor had he undergone, by his own aspiration or by grace from above, that psychological transformation which results in the permanent emergence of a new plane of consciousness.

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* "How curiously placed are we between the Eternal and the Ephemeral ! Any allusion to the affairs of the stomach sounds so hopelessly discordant when the mind is dwelling on the things of the spirit,—and yet the soul and the stomach have been living together so long. The very spot on which the moonlight falls is my landed property, but the moonlight tells me that my Zamindari is an illusion, and my Zamindari tells me that this moonlight is all emptiness. And as for poor me, I remain distructed between the two." (From Glimpses of Bengal, P. 152)

But on the positive side we can definitely say that at some rare moments Tagore did have

"Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
Which pull the more into the less,
Making the finite comprehend Infinity."

Second, he did realize that a 'higher' consciousness exists and that in such consciousness alone is Reality apprehended. Third, he did apprehend the presence of a Supreme Person, the Jivandevata, who for the poet, is no mere abstraction but a real Person, the "Thou" and "He" of so many of his songs. Fourth, he did perceive that through his own human and personal feeling of love and delight, it was the Supreme Person seeking to realize and fulfil Himself. Fifth, he did have a heightened sense of wonder, vastness and joy,—no ordinary wonder, vastness or joy, but that pure sense of them which comes when the lower self is transcended, and the higher self sees creation spring from a glad act of divine affirmation. And finally, de did sometimes have the sensation of subtle hints and intimations coming as it were from some 'other' world.

But mystical sensibility, at least in the case of Tagore, never implies anything eerie, magical, illusory or even supranatural; it is simply the mental or psychic phenomenon of deeper perception; at best you may call it supra-rational awareness—a direct access to the heart of things; nor can it be detached from the poet's organic sensibility, that is, his sensitiveness to the beauty of form and colour, the delicacy of touch, the deliciousness of taste and the sweetness of music in nature's objects. Alone in his transcendence he would have been a snow mass, cold and colourless but never a poet dear and close to man's heart. Tagore in fact creates a world which tickles man's senses and which like Keats's is rich, luscious and fragrant. Listen to the report the blooming, beautiful Chitra gives to that god with the five darts, the Lord of Love:

> The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malti bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And suddenly in the depth of my sleep I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched my slumbering body."*

Then take a poem:

"The flute-sound of a holiday music
floats in the air...
The 'shiuli' branches shiver
with the thrill of an impending
flower-time,
the touch of the dew is over the woodland.

On the fairy web in the forest path
the light and shadow feel each other.

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* From *Chitra*—a drama.

> The tall grass sends waves of
> laughter to the sky in its flowers.' †

In Tagore's poetry the Moon celebrates his wedding with the Moonlight; stars accompany the wedding procession and the cuckoo in the shimmering mango-grove plays music; the 'bel' flower opens, the 'vasanti' tree decks itself in colours, the 'van pulak' blooms, the silk cotton tree prepares to grow new leaves, and the red lilies show themselves off; the married women's bangles, 'confidently' washing clothes at the village pond, jingle; the maiden walking home alone and timidly at dusk from the village well throws at the poet a shy, furtive look; the heart of the green, riverine Bengal and its simple folk throbs ; the hidden heart of Existence is always touched.

Nor does it mean that he never sensed the movement of history in its objectivity, or the impact of science and technology in changing its course and expanding its dimension. In the first stir of the National Movement in Bengal his poetry alone without doubt was the most inspiring, more so beacause of its enticing rhythm and music, that sent forth Bengal's youngmen and women to plunge headlong into whirlwind, fire and tempest and offer their blood at the Mother's feet. Further, no doubt, before he went to Russia, history for the most part had remained for him a mere pageant of an unfolding of the 'spirit', and science mostly a depersonalizing and dehumanizing affair; he had then really thought that 'if there were no lower classes, how could there be any higher classes' and that the toiling masses 'were beyond the reach of help'; with his too individualistic an attitude he was then satisfied "if a man could bring real job and happy co-operation into one small village", as he had himself practically done at Sriniketan. But, once he had been to communist Russia and seen there the miracle of his own dream of bringing food, fresh air and health to the teeming millions and of emancipating 'their minds which have been shackled for ages', being actually realized, his open mind at once reacted, and when he returned to his country he burst out in song with the realisation that the country does not mean the soil, but the men on it, that they needed not the Brahma in meditation, but

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† *Poems*, No. 72.

"Needed food, needed life, needed
light, needed fresh air,
Needed strength, needed health,
longevity glowing with delight,
Bold and broad chest."

He did not now invoke in man, as he had previously done, Buddha's compassion or Mahatma's charity, but gave a battle call to those "who are preparing in every house" "to fight with the devil." He envisaged Science as the new Prometheus setting the world free from poverty, hunger and disease; presaged the imminent conflict* between those who labour and those who are parasites, and envisioned the poor, hungry man as the new Archangel of History breaking the barrage of Pseudo-Philosophy, clashing with the overfed and marching boldly ahead towards "New life"; he prophesied that the "morrow" was his, and that

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* In the story 'Great News' included in *The Parrot's Training and other Stories*, Visva-Bharti, 1944.

> "New life will awake in new light
> in new country."

Besides, with all his mystical sensibility Tagore is no different from any common human being. He is not different but only more human, meaning thereby that as a greater self-awareness differentiates man from a lower animal, so man increases in his humanity as his awareness grows wider, deeper and higher; he increases in humanity as he accepts life's little tears and smiles more fully and relishingly and feels things more deeply; in fact it is through the emotive depths of human life that the poet traverses his way to self-realization.

The truth seems to be that as by deep meditation or calm contemplation a Yogi or a Contemplative transcends limitations and attains to the Infinite and the Supreme One, so too in a poet's 'sensitive' and creative life moments come when the entire blood, nerve, mental and psychic stuff, the whole being, finds itself concentrated upon something, and on a sudden, a new realization, vision or truth dawns—the artist sees the soul of beauty: his perception becomes spiritual intuition. We find, mystic invasion sending a mystic into transcendence; poetic invasion sending a poet into transcendence. Isn't then a poet too, in moments of his supreme poetic experience and utterance a Contemplative ? It becomes really difficult to distinguish true poetic from mystic sensibility, unless poetic sensibility is taken as confined merely to flutterings on surfaces, but then the heart's profoundest satisfaction will be missing—

> "Give me truths,
> For I am weary of the surfaces,"

Emerson had said. Deeper poetic sensibility does invade profundity—the realm of mysticism. Poetry like prayer is an activity endeavouring to touch the depth of existence—the cosmic heart. Tagore's poetry was like that. It is well known that "In painting, as in his music and poems he would concentrate with the traditional skill of the Indian yogi, creating, as it were, from out of the depths of the unconsciousness."* Dr. James H. Cousins records that "Rabindranath held his spontaneous lyrics to be his transcripts of the voice of his ishta devata (personal divinity).†

Taken in its full, Tagore's poetry has Keats's sensuousness; in it also mingle the harmony, rhythm and music of Shelley's and also the silence, peace and sublimity of Wordsworth's; and, besides, through its fullness glows a tint that reflects the face of the Ineffable, and from its depths emanates a strain that floats towards the Heavens.

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* From D. P. Mukerjee *Tagore—A Study*.

† Dr. J. H. Cousins in his essay" Tagore on Tagore", pub. in Gurudev Tagore, Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay, 1946.

Tagore has mystical sensibility, but it is there with an ever more joyful acceptance of the world, an ever greater identification of his own being with all the animate and inanimate objects of nature; and there are mystical experiences, but they are always told in terms of human joys and sufferings, or hope and despair : The sensibility is poetico-mystical. At everystep in the poet's music there is the air of the sensuous and the suprasensuous, and there mingle the beauty and wonder of the time and the Timeless. The finite and the Infinite, both together, make life, world, poetry and heaven full :

> Because you and I shall meet
> The heavens are full of light,
> Because you and I shall meet
> The world is full of greenery.*

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* Tagore's poem 'The Bridegroom'—taken from *'Sheaves'*, tr. by Nagendranath Gupta.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOUL OF EXISTENCE

The King and the Poet, two characters in Tagore's *The Cycle of Spring*, are talking. Here is a part of their conversation : (The names of the speakers, except in the beginning, are not given as they can be easily guessed).

The King: Shall I be able to understand the sense of what you have written ?

The Poet : No, king, what a poet writes is not meant to have any sense.
What then ?
To have the tune itself.
What do you mean ? Is there no philosophy in it ?
No, none at all, thank goodness.
What does it say, then ?

King, it says 'I exist', Don't you know the
meaning of the first cry of the new-born child ?
The child, when it is born, hears at once the
cries of the earth and water and sky, which
surround him,—and they all cry to him,
'We exist', and his tiny little heart responds,
and cries out in its turn, 'I exist'.
My poetry is like the cry of that new-born child.
It is a response to the cry of the Universe.

> Is it nothing more than that, Poet ?
> No, nothing more. There is life in my song,
> which cries, "In joy and in sorrow, in work
> and in rest, in life and in death,
> in victory and in defeat, in this world
> and in the next, all hail to the 'I exist'."

This grand fact of existence—who would deny it ? Just imagine for a moment that there were nothing existing, not even nothingness ! 'Not how the universe is, but that it is, is the mystical.' This 'Isness'—Existence—impinges upon the poet and he sings. Tagore's poetry gives me to feel that it has essentially and ultimately grown out of the touch of the poet's soul with the soul of an object and through it with the soul of Existence.

Its origin does not lie, as we have usually supposed, in sentiments, feelings or emotions, unless these in themselves imply that intense awareness which draws one close to the inner life of a thing. These may be there, but they are only secondary; in fact feeling arises and poetry comes only when the poet's 'vision' has grasped the heart of an object—the object which is an existential fact. The poet moving on life's highway incidentally encounters a face, a wayside flower, a cloud, a rivulet, a solitary lass, a beggar, a situation, an idea, when suddenly, like a flash revealing the dark world, his mind lights upon the soul of the 'object', sees in it a palpitating something in the very similitude of his own heart; sees the very wonder of the object—existing in its own right against the vastness of the infinitude, with its own form, motion or will,*—the poet's heart spontaneously extending to it, bathing it with a milky stream of sympathy and love and finding it to be suffering from the same ache or felicity from which he suffers : well it is something like this, when the germ of poetry is laid. Avows Tagore :

My heart sings at the wonder of my place
in this world of light and life;
at the feel in my pulse of the rhythm of creation
cadenced by the swing of the endless time.

I feel the tenderness of the grass in my forest walk,
the wayside flowers startle me :
that the gifts of the infinite are strewn in the dust
Wakens my song in wonder.

I have seen, have heard, have lived;
in the depth of the known have felt
the truth that exceeds all knowledge
which fills my heart with wonder and
I sing.†

No great poet, it seems to me, has ever been able to do without clasping to his heart the soul of existence. What are Wordsworth's

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* Has an object will ? Why discuss ? Let imagination play. This is what Tagore sees and says : "......desire is as much a creative force within us as it is within a tree, which is the very incarnation of the desire to be a tree. By the strength of this desire the tree gathers the water and the materials by which eventually it becomes a tree, it achieves freedom. Packed away in the seed whether it be of mango, rose or palm, is that element of desire that finds expression in its own special variety of tree, and by the time the tree comes to die, this same element of desire has once more been packed within a seed." (Tagore in his letter to L. K. Elmhirst, Dec. 1924. Publishd in 'Visvabharati Quarterly') Vol. XXII No. 1.

† *Poems*, No. 65.

> Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
> And on the earth ! Ye visions of the hills !
> And souls of lonely places ! ”—

if not the particular souls (modals as Whitehead calls them) of existing objects entwined with the unitive soul of Existence ? What is that ‘something’ of his

> ‘Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man”,

if not the soul of Existence ? and yet again: Isn't his Lucy Gray the ineffable spirit of Existence ? Lucy who, though gone and unseen, always

> “Sings a solitary song
> That whistles in the wind.”—

as if, we were feeling the very soul of existence cooing about us. Keats's genuine poetry too springs when his imagination has, in the objects, seized beauty which must be Truth. His “O for a life of sensation rather than thoughts !” is not the cry of a rank epicurean but “of one animated by the mystic hunger for living reality.” * He vents the same realisation when he makes the confession: “If a sparrow comes before my window I take part

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* Gerald Bullet : *The English Mystics*, p. 217.

in its existence and pick about the gravel."[†] Shelley's God too was no other than the existing power of existence,[‡] whose sensation he felt,

> 'Down, Down !
> In the depth of the Deep,
> Down, down !'

Hopkins similarly, in his "God's Grandeur", says, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." We are all aware of Shakespeare's 'passionate absorption in the life of things', aware of his

> "Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with Beauty."

which "give us an imtimate sense of objects—seize their secret for us, and make us participate in their real life", and of his perception of a "motional something"[*] ever persisting behind this visible whole. Sri Aurobindo, the great poet-mystic refers to the same source of inspiration when he writes

> "I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
> The glory and the beauty of thy face."

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cf † Okakura Kakuzo (1863-1913), a Japanese artist, writing to a member of the Tagore family :

> "A strange, little bird has alighted on my window-sill.
> Its wondrous eyes like mighty sword-blades or stars
> on an entranced lake,
> Peer deep into my very soul."

(The Visvabharati Quarterly Vol. 21 No. 2)

[‡] Shelley defining God once wrote : "God is merely a synonym for the existing power of Existence."

[*] Dr. C. Spurgeon.

But what after all is this soul of existence? 'What is this special kind of knowing we claim for poetry?' Let me make an attempt to understand it: Consider an apple hanging from a tree.

(i) The apple gives us health, it refreshes us,—this is one fact about the apple—its utilitarian truth.

(ii) The apple contains carbon, oxygen, hydrogen etc., it is a compound of various chemical elements which ultimately exist in the form of electric waves and particles; so the apple ultimately is an 'energy phenomenon'—its scientific or objective truth.

(iii) The apple is there smooth and shiny in its cherry hue, dangling under the blue sky and presenting a wonderful harmony of form, colour and circumstance: the sight may put you out of your forms and madden your mind. That is another fact about the apple—its aesthetic truth.

(iv) And further, perhaps, it may madden you so overwhelmingly that in a state of self-forgetfulness you may, in your own pulse, feel the very rhythm of creation, you may, with your eyes 'in fine frenzy rolling' see within the apple an unceasing dance of light. Those who are competent to report on such matters have said that as the frenzy settles down, you may feel in the depth of the object itself (or is it in the depth of the self?) the beauty, peace, harmony or delight that are in the heart of the cosmos. You are transported to what may be called the 'mysterious tremendum'—the Infinite. That is the object's poetico-mystical significance.

So, there was one fact about the apple—its health giving quality, it was its utilitarian significance; then there was the second fact—its physico-chemical quality, it was its objective significance; then there was the third fact—its power of exciting a sense of beauty, it was its aesthetic (Poetic) significance; then in the same spell of its power of awakening a sense of beauty, the apple had one more significance—its power to introduce us to the Infinite. This was its poetico-mystic significance;—the same which, according to Blake, it is the purpose of art to express*. This we call an object's truest and most real significance : This is object as "significant of ideas"; object as 'pregnant with dim but potent reference to spiritual reality.'

So the soul or the true significance of a thing is not its utility or 'materiality', but its beauty,† its harmony and music,§ and its spirituality,¶ which all are essentially the same. When we say so, we may not fail to notice that these are not, in a sense, qualities in the thing itself alone, but they are also 'perceptions', or 'ideas' or 'attitudes' that the poet or the artist puts,* no doubt unwittingly, into the thing in the very act of experience and creates a world—a 'feeling world', real, independent and complete in itself. They are put into the thing by 'that faculty of the mind which we call imagination', which is nothing else but an illumined state of consciousness itself.† It is its own beauty, delight, harmony and formlessness that the consciousness is experiencing: the thing losing itself in the heightened consciousness of the poet, and the poet losing himself in the very existential fact of the thing: When such a thing happens it is as if—the phenomenon of the aesthetic self becoming one with the aesthetic object in an aesthetic continuum has occurred; a kindling rapture has joined the seer and the seen; distinction between subject and object has been obliterated and the identity of the two, in terms of Higher awareness, realised.

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* Blake held that art is to 'cleanse the doors of perception so that everything may appear as it is—Infinite'.

† I. A. Richards : "Traditionally what is said to be known thus mystically through the arts is Beauty."

§ I. A. Richards : "Works of art which most un-mistakably attune (us) to existence."

¶ Sri Aurobindo:"A touch of God's rapture in creation's acts."

Whether beauty and delight are in the 'subject' or the 'object' is an interesting question. Philosophers may argue it ad infinitum and yet never arrive at a definite conclusion. A Whitehead might say that poets instead of chanting the beauty of the rose or of the nightingale's song should address their praise to themselves, for, in reality it is they who create the beauties they see in the rose or in the bird's song; but the true poet's heart knows—unmistakably—that without the bloom of the world he couldn't sing and his self would dry up, that the reality is the actual full-blown lotus, not its 'idea' in the 'ideal' world; and, above all, the plain commonsense knows that though the 'experiencer' is within, the 'cause' is without. Verily, reality is struck only when both interact: Only when both the subject and the object meet do sparks of creation fly; it is then alone that Reality comes into being; a sentence is completed; a point is scored in heaven and the fact of existence realized.

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* Gentile :"The artist translates into objective representation nothing but his own feeling."

† Dr. James H. Cousins defines creative imagination as "not the capacity of imagining things but the borderland faculty of translating receptions from the hinterland of consciousness into appropriate images."(From his essay'Tagore on Tagore' opt. cit.)

Now there is nothing much mystical about this whole affair of the soul of existence. It would be misunderstanding the point if one were to mean by it something beyond, extra, other than what is tangibly, visibly and really existing. The spirit of existence is no other entity than the existing object itself; it is no other than the whole tree, the round ocean, the starry heaven, the man, the woman, the football, the cricket and the 'Halchal' (the entire movement) that we see. The poet does no more than see this simple fact of existence directly, touch its heart and sing. Even what is taken to be transcendent is nothing beyond the totality of being and becoming; it has its existence in the deeps of our own physico-psychic stuff.

What is needed is only seeing the object with a different 'eye',—seeing it in isolation from its cognitive, practical or utilitarian aspects, and freed from its antecedents and consequences in the matter of fact world of space and time; seeing it for the moment as an unrelated totality, unique in its own individuality,[*] as the daffodils were seen by Wordsworth, 'the moving waters at their priestlike task' by Keats, and Beatrice's face by Dante. So, how you see the thing makes the whole difference. "The Earth is crammed with heaven", says Mrs. Browning, "But only he who sees takes off his shoes." "I shut my eyes", says Tagore," and see in my heart the beauty that is beyond all forms."[‡] Really, 'true seeing' comes when our eye has been made quiet by the power of harmony (Wordsworth); when "My outward sense is gone, my inward sense feels" (Emily Brontë"); when

We have stept
Into a sort of oneness and our state
Is like a floating spirit's. (Keats)

Look, with what crystal clarity Tagore brings out the contrast between these two ways of seeing things:

We know no one,
All men are strangers
Each goes his own way

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[*] "The artist finds out the unique, the individual, which is yet in the heart of the universal." Tagore in his *Personality*.

[‡] *Poems*, 31.

All by himself,
No fellow traveller has he on the path.
Into the frame of our familiar world
We fit each man, and limit him;
He lives for us within the narrow bounds
Of name and circumstance,
And works for a fixed pay,
Bearing the mark of the ordinary on his brow.
Then, suddenly, from we know not where,
Comes the spring breeze of Love,
Blowing away the veil of the limiting known
To reveal the Ever-unknown.
We see him before us, his own self, soul, apart,
Unique, uncommon, wholly without peer.*

The great fact is Existence, recognized by its vibration, colour and love, vibration here implying the universal process, movement and change; colour, all forms, names and sounds; and love, all awareness and feeling. Tagore may or may not have had any mystical vision, but there is no denying that he did receive the impact of existence at a deeper level of perception, hearing the unheard melodies and seeing the unseen face:—

"I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world : with what fond and familiar ease it fills my heart, this encounter with the Eternal stranger."‡

And then:

"I have kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs ; I have wrapt it within my heart in numberless folds ; I have flooded its days and nights with thoughts till the world and my life have grown one,—and I love my life because I love the light of the sky so enwoven with me."*

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* From, *Sesh Saptak,* Poem No. 12, English Translation pub. in the Visvabharti Quarterly Vol. 19. No. 4.

‡ From, *The Fugitive,* Macmillan.

Inspiring the poet to make and sing songs purely by the simple fact of their existence are common, familiar things. Hear the poet once again:

I love the light dancing on the leaves,
The wild wind in the Sal forests intoxicates me;
Along the red earth of the road
The good man hurries to the market,
The lovely little girl plays in the dust.

What I see in front of me
Is like a harp playing in my eyes.
My reed is but a bamboo pipe,
And I play the tunes of the fields.
The children that have drunk
Of the new light of the blue sky—
I have filled my eyes with their glances
And I have attuned my heart
To the music of their young voices"—‡

But this inspiration comes only when the poet's 'transformed' eye has peered into the heart of the thing, as if he were looking into his own self existing as the 'other'. He mentions in his *Religion of Man* the fact that on many occasions in the early hour of the dawn he ran to meet the sun's rays glistening over the dew-drops. He felt in such companionship with the sky, the morning breeze and light, a large meaning of his own self when the barrier vanished between himself and what was beyond himself.

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* From, *Fruit-Gathering*, 53, Macmillan.

‡ The poem 'Inspiration' from *Sheaves*;

On such occasions he saw

> 'the sunlight and the starlights
> carry the smile of existence
> and springtime its songs,' *

and felt it (the soul of existence) frolicking in the child's limbs and wistfully looking through the maiden's dark eyes. Many a song in *The Fugitive*, *Fruit-Gathering* and *The Gardener* is an attempt as it were to catch the fleeting soul of Existence. He says in *The Fugitive*—

> 'Darkly you sweep on, Eternal Fugitive......
> Is your heart lost to the Lover calling you across
> his immeasurable loneliness ?†

In *The Gardener*:

> " I try to grasp the beauty; it eludes me, leaving
> only the body in my hands.
> Baffled and weary I come back.
> How can the body touch the flower which
> only the spirit may touch."‡

In another song of *The Gardener*:

> " I Hunt for the golden stag.
> You may smile, my friends, but I pursue
> the vision that eludes me." §

In *Fruit-Gathering*:

> " I asked her, "Tell me, whom do you seek ?"
> She only said, "I wait for him of the unknown name."

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* *Poems*, No. 37, Visva-Bharati.

† *The Fugitive*—No. 1, Macmillan.

‡ *The Gardener* No. 49, Macmillan.

§ *Ibid.*—5 9.

> Days pass by and she cries, "When will my beloved
> come whom I know not, and be known to me
> for ever ?" ¶

And so also in many a poem of *'The Crescent Moon'*, the poet touches the depth of existence in the heart's love for the child and in its pity for his innocence and helplessness:

> "Clasp him to your heart and bless him.
> He has come into this land of an
> hundred cross-roads." ♆

In *Gitanjali* and in most of his plays, the soul of existence grows more deeply symbolic. It appears as the poet's God, Life of Life, Lover and Beloved, besides as mere ineffable spirit of being and beauty. It also appears, sometimes, as a flood of light and mirth:

> "Light, my light, the world-filling light, the
> eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light !
> Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre
> of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the
> chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind
> runs wild, laughter passes over the earth"*;

sometimes as the truth which kindles the light of reason in his mind; sometimes as the power that gives him strength to act, and sometimes even as the Unknown Woman

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¶ *Fruit-Gathering* No. 57, Macmillan.

♆ From the poem " Benediction " in *The Crescent Moon*, Macmillan.

* From *Gitanjali*, Poem No. 57, Macmillan.

> "There was none in the world who ever saw
> her face to face, and she remained in her
> loneliness waiting for thy recognition." †

And finally in *The Cycle of Spring* it appears simply as **I EXIST**—as the very column of Existence encountering you in all its solidity and whiteness. ‡

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† Ibid, 66

‡ "In the heart of the white dwell all the colours of the rainbow." (Tagore in *The Cycle of Spring*.)

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD SEEKS MAN

> "Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, "He comes, comes, ever comes." *

Deeply pervasive in Tagore's poetry is the note of God's love for man. God is always waiting for the moment when responsive love might waken in man's heart. With wistful, expectant eyes, He looks at him begging : 'Man ! I long for your love, won't you give me your love ? Man ! smile; only when you smile, can I smile.' Through the tear drops of a woman's eye, God realizes the deep compassion of His own heart. He looks fondly at the child and says : 'Child ! Play; and, let me also play with you.' The poet has known that in the child's delight it is the Divine Himself experiencing delight :

> "When I bring you coloured toys,
> My child, I understand why there
> is such a play of colours on cloud,
> on water, and why flowers are painted in tints."‡

God awaits man's coming, but if man does not go to God, God comes to man.

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* From *Gitanjali*, song No. 45, Macmillan.

‡ *The Crescent Moon.*

"Have you not heard," sings the poet, "his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes. Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes." †

By the dim shore of the ink-black river, by the far edge of the frowning forest, through the mazy depth of gloom, He is threading his course to come to man. Even if man does not care for Him, he comes.

"The day was "says the poet to God, "when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life."

Even if man keeps busy in his own play, He comes :

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my play room are the same that are echoing from star to star."

And even if man reples Him—

"If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love still waits for me "*

The poet knows it for certain—

"Yes I know, this is nothing but thy love, Oh Beloved of my heart—this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon the forehead."

Very humbly He begs of man his love. The poet surprisingly asks Him :

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† *Gitanjali.*

* Compare : A harlot approaches Kabir in tearful prayer; Kabir sees God reflected in her eyes, and says : "I dare not turn my God away, when he comes, branded with insult. *Gitanjali*, 24.

> "You are so rich oh Lord! Yet you wish to take little grains of corn from my hands!
>
> The world is laughing at you that to make me a donor you will be a beggar and that from your chariot you will come down on the ground and walk with me in the fields for ages and ages."

It is God's own necessity that he makes overtures to man; for if he did not do so He could not realize his own heart's beauty and love and delight. Hadn't God known love's intensity, beauty and bliss through Tagore's own heart ? The poet calls out to Him, saying :

> "O thou Lord of all heavens, where would be thy
> love if I were not ?"

He points out to Him :

> "In my heart is the endless play of thy delight.
> In my life thy will is ever taking shape";

and also

> "......you find your love carven into the image
> of my life,"

and further still

> "Thou givest thyself to me in love and then
> feelest thine own entire sweetness in me."

God is ever seeking man's straying heart through tangle of paths. But man (or earth) in his smallness does not easily believe that God is constantly after him in love. Assurance however comes from Heaven, the sky, on fine cloudy days :

> "Today the far distant limitless sky bends
> over the earth green with the green of its forests,
> and whispers in her ear "I am yours." The earth
> says "How can that be ? You are immense and I
> am so small."
>
> The sky says, "Have I not drawn all round me
> the curtain of my clouds to set bounds to myself ?"
>
> The earth says, "What riches are yours in the
> radiance of your stars ! But I have no such
> wealth of light."
>
> The sky replies, "Today I have lost my moon
> and my sun and my stars, and come away. I have
> you left to me."
>
> The earth says, "My tear-filled heart trembles
> restlessly in every wind that blows. But you are
> ever unmoved"
>
> "Have you not seen the tears tremble in my
> eyes today ?" Asks the sky "My heart is soft
> now like that soft green heart of yours."
>
> And so saying, the sky fills the eternal void
> that parts sky from earth with the song
> of tears." *

God embraces man, presses him close to His heart as a lover in infatuation would do his beloved. This is a sweet, strange play that goes incessantly on within the heart of all beings. The poem shows that the poet has seen this 'play.' Thompson's God too had followed man

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* From Tagore's poem—"Cloud Messenger", Pub. in Vishvabharati Quarterly. Vol, 18, Aug.—October, 1950.

"Down the nights and
down the days............
down the arches of the years,......
those strong Feet that followed,
followed after";

but He did so to save man as it were from sin and to win him back from the world; while Tagore's God follows man to fulfil Himself in him, to realize His own infinity, love, colour and delight in man's heart and in the world. That makes the whole difference: Thompson's concept remains merely moralist, anthropomorphic, while Tagore's including it, grows spiritual and cosmic like Sri Aurobindo's who, in his great epic *Savitri*, writes :

" God
Who hides himself in bird and beast and man
Sweetly to find himself again by love
By oneness."[*]

It is also like the Swiss-Austrian poet Rainer **M.** Rilke's experience, who in the many poems in his "The Book of Hours", and in his later poems, emphasizes again and again how God is in need of man, how He waits for man to do His work. In fact God would have remained an utter nothingness or at best like one weltering in miserable loneliness, if He had not abandoned his freedom, and undertaken to unfold and realize himself in the world. "Thy glory rests upon the glory that we are."[‡] It was a happy 'decision' that He took upon himself the bonds of creation and let

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[*] Book XII, Epilogue.

[‡] From Tagore's Poem : "The Soul's Freedom"

His garment be covered with dust, and strove, instead of blowing His own lonely trumpet, to raise a song through myriad musical voices : It is only through the finites that the music of the Infinite rings out.

In the beginning the Eternal Baby (God) was free from every tie in the land of the tiny crescent moon. And

> "It was not for nothing he gave up his freedom. He knows that there is room for endless joy in mother's little corner of a heart, and it is sweeter far than liberty to be caught and pressed in her arms."*

When a human child is born (that is, when consciousness emerges embodied in form), the whole Nature waits upon it, God plays to it upon his flute and the Poet sings to it :

> " The sun smiles and watches your toilet.
> The sky watches over you when you sleep in
> your mother's arms, and the morning comes
> tiptoe to your bed and kisses your eyes.
>
> The wind carries away in glee
> the tinklet of your anklet bells...
>
> The world-mother keeps her seat
> by you in your mother's heart.
>
> He who plays his music to the stars is
> standing at your window with the flute." †

God is in love with His creation and yearns for a response. He is abroad, wandering in the world, craving of man to let Him realize 'anand' through his (man's) being, for it is only through finite forms that the infinite Person could realize its creative function. He is not the impersonal, colourless Infinite: He is Beauty, Love, and Delight and he is striving to see what He is—Beauty, Love, and Delight—in the mirror of His own creation. The Beauty is the beauty of the human face or of the crimson clouds against the setting sun; the love and delight are the love and delight of a human heart and of the whole Nature. If man never laughed there never was delight in God; if man never loved there never was love in God's heart, and if there was no glow of beauty on a woman's face or on the face of Nature there never was any beauty in God. God's own potentialities are being realized in the unceasing process of the world, in the heart of each individual being. 'God finds himself by creating.'* Tagore had seen through this secret and the outcome was his song. Thus his poetry, in a sense, is the poetry of God craving for the love of man, poetry of the infinite seeking to fulfil and lose Himself in the finite.

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* *The Crescent Moon.*

† Ibid.

But there are other songs, a large number of them, which produce altogether a different note. They embody man's deepest craving for God, who is lovingly addressed as the Jivandevata—'Life of my life', embody the beloved's yearning for the Lover; the cry—'I want thee, only thee' ever ringing in the core of heart. So it becomes difficult to say whether in Tagore's poetry there is greater emphasis on 'God seeks man' or on 'Man seeks God.' One impression is that in the background of even those songs which are directly expressive of man's craving for God, lies the idea of God's delight in becoming, in seeking a corner of intense love in the human heart. "The Infinite must descend into the finite, the concrete, and through every concrete express its infinite character so that it may attain its real fulfilment. Upto the end the poet has been loyal to this perspective of life and this forms the keynote of his mental temperament."* "No doubt", writes Sri Nolinikanto Gupta, the scholar, mystic-poet and critic, "he (Tagore) has admitted that the 'I' has no existence separate from God, but (for him) a deeper and more mystic truth is that God has no existence separate from that of the 'I'." So in a way, Tagore's particular achievement does not lie in trying to enter the 'sunny' world of the Infinite, but it lies in bringing down the Infinite to reflect itself through a particular wayside flower, through the upright 'Bakul' tree, through the child's cry for the mother and through a maiden's smile: The sky has been held in a water pitcher: the joy of the Infinite has been realized in finite existence.

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* *Stray Birds*, 46.

The truth however seems to consist in the two—

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* Dasgupta : *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Philosopher,* p. 92

God's craving for man's love and man's craving for God's love—interacting; 'in God moving in the mystic direction of the finite universe, and man moving in the mystic direction of the infinite.'* It is the poet's realization of God's need and purpose to manifest more and more of his divinity in this world as of man's need and purpose to widen, heighten and deepen his awareness so as to bear the light, sweetness, harmony and joy of the supreme One to ever larger areas of life on this earth. God fulfils himself in his love for man, as man fulfils himself in his love for God. "Thou dwelleth in me and I in thee. Thou without me or I without thee are nothing." Ultimately and essentially God coming to man or man going to God is the same thing. It is no other than Sri Aurobindo's—descent of the divine into man and the ascent of man into the Divine. A flash of light issues when the Divine knows that he is becoming self-conscious in the finite and when, on the other hand, the finite consciousness in man receives a touch of the Infinite. When it happens so, the poet's intensest experience is gained and a mystic's heart is illuminated. That moment is a moment of glory in existence. It all seems to be a mysterious play of the One appearing as Two, some sort of a reciprocal play of hide and seek between God and his other self—the world and man. When love awakes in the heart of man, he starts yearning with a nameless longing: he goes mad after the unknown; but that, in a mysterious way, is God's own achievement. In the supreme moment of love's realisation, creation becomes aware of itself, of its purpose; God finds himself in man, man sees God—sees a face of beauty shining at the concentrated point of his awareness:

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* I am indebted to Firaq Gorakhpuri (Prof. Raghupati Sahai) for this expression.

"Truth he wins
in his inner heart washed
with his own light—" ‡

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‡ From Tagore's last poem which he had dictated seven days before his death. Pub. in *Poems*, Visva-Bharati.

CHAPTER FIVE

FREEDOM IN ATTACHMENT : INFINITE IN FINITE

Freedom craves for a dwelling place within Bondage.*

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'The joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite—this has been the subject on which my writings have dwelt †

Generally, man has sought salvation, religious pefection and peace in detachment from the world—in renunciation; he has sought immortality as something after and beyond this life; tried to achieve God as something above this world; and, conceived of the ultimate Reality as something abstract and absolute. But that is not so with Tagore. Freedom he seeks in bondage; Immortality in the intensity of a moment; God in the world; Reality in form and colour. Moreover, under the pressure of modern sceptic atmosphere there would be nothing surprising if a man, looking at the immensities of space extending beyond the farthest stars and seeing everything—individuals, wars, empires, books, buildings, deeds—vanishing away into Time's vast, gaping pit,—took all to be a big nihil and turned

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**Utsarg*

†Reminiscences

a cynic hating the world, or an epicurean enjoying it superficially, or a desolate yogi renouncing it utterly. But a theist, securely grounded in the sunny Vedic spirit and in faith in the divine conduct of the universe, as Tagore was, modern scepticism or nihilism never attracted or troubled him. But even theism might lead one, as it has often done, to withdraw oneself from the world and seek fulfilment in God alone. Tagore broke away from such orthodoxy; his poetic sensibility made him a theist who sought fulfilment in the world with all its human connections, regarding it as the joyous blossoming forth of one 'Being'. He affirms:

> 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.
> I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.
>
> No, I will never shut the doors of my senses.
> The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.
>
> Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination
> of joy and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.*

Explaining, in a letter to a friend, what he really meant to convey in the passage, Tagore writes:

> Nature, with its form, colour and fragrance, man with intellect and mind, his love and attachment, have enchanted me; they are helping me to free my mind and spreading me out from the bondage of my own self......Like the love that surpasses the object of love, the light that shows not only the things we are in search of, but illumines the whole universe, so through the beauties of the world—it is God who is attracting us. No one else has power to attract.

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* *Gitanjali*

Despite that if we were to insist on 'deliverance' (mukti) from this world he would mock at us asking:

> Deliverance ? Where is the deliverance to be found ? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation. He is bound with us all for ever. †

As a poet Tagore knew that a poem achieves felicity and freedom when its flow has been held within the bonds of metre, and rhyme and measure: Seeking freedom in bondage—that is Tagore. But you can't fix him in any rigid mould, that is the difficulty. For, while seeking freedom in being bound with the world, he also says:

> "......In this hurly-burly I lose touch with the peace that abides in Truth. Whenever I have a little time to sit down quietly, I find a refuge within my own soul."

Further :

> "......within the dephts of our soul, there is a place for eternal peace, where our eternal selves exist beyond the births and deaths, the unions and separations, the gains and losses of the world. If we can make room for ourselves there, then we really live; earthly living is not living at all."*

At one time he would give an impression that he is a spiritual Monist believing in the existence of Spirit alone, and an idealist, indentifying God with the deep yearning and pang of the heart, as if the yearning itself were God. Doesn't yearning at its intensest point, the poet himself seems to ask, touch Infinity itself ?—Like Kant affirming, "God is not an external fact, but only an emotion within us;" St. Augustine confessing, 'in my own striving, in my own longing, You live'; or Goethe's Faust impressing upon his beloved Margaret,

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† *Gitanjali*

* Letters to his Daughter written in 1927. Pub in *"Visvabharati Quarterly,"* Vol. XXIII, No. I.

> "When thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
> Call it then what thou wilt—
> Call it Bliss ! Heart ! Love ! God !"

But the next moment, like a thorough-going objectivist he would address God, saying:

> "It is only there where you are in tune with the whole world that I am in contact with you—it is not in the solitariness of the forest or in the corner of my own mind that I am to find Lord. But when you are dear to all you are dear to me. Where you extend thy hands to others, it is there that my love also wakes up. Love cannot remain in secret, it spreads out like light."

And to the querry: Where is Heaven ?—he would reply as he did to the child in his *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, saying,

> (Of course) "my child—the sages tell us it is beyond the limits of birth and death, unswayed by the rhythm of day and night; it is not of the earth.
>
> But your poet knows that its eternal hunger is for time and space, and it strives evermore to be born in the fruitful dust. Heaven is fulfilled in your sweet body, my child, in your palpitating heart.
>
> The sea is beating its drums in joy, the flowers are a-tiptoe to kiss you. For heaven is born in you in the arms of the mother-dust."

The poet, as if he were the most incorrigible of realists and the most pleasant gourmand, would, at the sight of a sweet mango, hug it and seem to affirm that God is in every blade of grass, leaf, petal and flower, in the vast, starry heavens, in the day's noontide glory and in the silence of the night—God is active and realisable in the cosmic dance itself : even in this involvement there is His delight. He would equate God with the world, with all that exists visibly or invisibly, and sing :

> I've loved this world's face splendour-girt,
> With all my heart,
> And I have wound
> In fold on fold
> My life around it and around.

Then, true to his initiation in the Brahmosamaj which regarded the impersonal Brahma,—the One without second, without form—as the only Reality, he would in one mood talk and preach like an iconoclast, but slipping into another he would visualize the impersonal, formless God verily as the other person standing in real form and colour before him as his very Jivandevata, the Lord of his Life, and like one in passionate love with that Beauteous Form he would cry out :

> I Love you, beloved. Forgive me my love.
> Like a bird losing its way I am caught,*

and

> Do not go, my love, without asking my leave,...
> Could I but entangle your feet with my heart and hold

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* *The Gardener*, Song No. 33.

> them fast to my breast !
> Do not go, my love, without asking my leave." †

As to rebirth and immortality of individual soul, while in one mood he seems to say that individual personality with all its adjuncts of longings and aspirations survives death and renews itself in birth after birth, in another he would say that an individual personality, under the impact of the surrounding cosmic motion, moves only during its life time, and then having played its game and put its 'seed' in another being it gets lost for ever in the play and the whirl of the Whole which alone is eternal and immortal

And then, finding the Infinite enmeshed in life's circumstances, in a chain of cause and effect, while the poet will at one moment go so far as to say that

> 'Waiting upon extra-human intervention to save man from himself was a betrayl of the Antardevata, and never brought results',

at another he would admonish you and say :

> "O Fool, to try to carry thyself on thy own shoulders !
> O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door !
> Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,
> and never look behind in regret." *

Why all these self-contradictions ? Perhaps because life is like that. Didn't Mahatma Gandhi, the Apostle of non-violence, approve of an ailing calf being shot dead. Didn't Shankracharya, the uncompromising

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† *Ibid* Song No 34.

* *Gitanjali*, Song No. 9.

Monist, set up the idol of Mother Goddess and worship it with all the prescribed rites and formalities of a Dualist ? Tagore above everything else was human and he was in love with life—life which in its variety and fulness cannot be circumscribed into one formula. In him the true spirit of humanity and human life was so constantly alive that his religion could not be any other than the religion of 'full man', and his philosophy, similarly, any other than the philosophy of 'full life.' Varieties of experience, thought and belief so wondrously and beautifully mingle up in the one voice of humanity that rises from him that it seems to be no voice of any particular religion or philosophy—of Hinduism, Vedantism, Vaishnavism or Buddhism—, but that of a human heart identified in love with the existence around. You cannot dub it, strictly speaking, even as the religion or philosophy of Humanism, as if he had been tutored into it by books and teachers or by the liberal culture of the West. It was only an expanded poetic sensibility going direct into the heart of things and knowing the truth beyond doubt :

> " I have already made the confession that my religion is a poet's religion. All that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge." *

His was a heightened awareness, a heart-current of feeling penetrating everywhere and grasping the delight and ache of existence. In the penumbral light of a supra-rational consciousness, in the

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* *The Religion of Man*, p. 107

plenitude of poetic experience, all differences and contradictions had vanished and the poet seemed to feel—

(1) that, Reality is the spark that flies when the finite and the infinite, or matter and mind, or body and soul, or form and spirit, or subject and object meet. In the 'Whole' there is no dichotomy, there is only harmony of motion and beat. When one, in a contemplative state, arrives, beyond the apparent and the external, at the Ultimate State of Existence—the one Cause or Spirit—,it does not necessarily imply that the one Cause or Spirit alone is true, and that all which is visible externally is mere illusion; or that when the inner reality is realized the outer variety ceases to exist. Tagore, for all his Vedantism, seemed to believe (like a follower of the Sankhya-Yoga School of philosophy) that the transformations that the Ultimate Cause undergoes—the multitudinous phenomena, faces and objects in which the Infinite manifests itself—are as true as the Cause itself. God is world as well as soul, motion as well as stillness; He is the beauteous form as well as the inner yearning. The high and intense imagination of the poet tears the veil of mystery, when the cause and the object seem to dissolve into each other; the object retains its truth as a separate, individual object and yet simultaneously it becomes a face beautiful of the Universal.

(2) That, through 'moha' lies 'mukti'—, the way to salvation is through loving attachment with

the world. Man, by knowing and enjoying the world, its tastes, colours, melodies and fragrances and by getting into their depths only enhances himself and touches the frontiers of Infinity. Adoring all that was of the world and embracing every one in sympathy,the poet was sublimely natural and human in that it was through man's heart and nature's that he had his introduction to the Loving one. Without this how could the poet have ever sensed Beauty in life ?

(3) That, the moment of intensest feeling is eternity: in such a moment is immortality realized. The infinity of space and eternity of time are self-evident, and so also the infinity and eternity of existence as a whole, but the wonder for Tagore was that the Infinite and the Timeless was realizable in the centre of our heart. Verily, in a moment of heightened awareness the poet's heart, in widest sympathy expanding, would feel the fulness of its being : a flower in full bloom, looking at the azure heavens above, does realize eternity in the very sensation of fulness. Outwardly the things remain the same, and yet with the shift in the intensity and rhythm of our consciousness, our apperception suffers a sea change. In the concentrated intensity of feeling every atom becomes immeasurable, every moment eternal. Tagore seems to be nearer the experience that it is the one Life and one Spirit that is eternal and that human beings are various centres of awareness appearing and disappearing for God's own intenser and truer sensation and realization of

Himself, but not the less significant for that: The eternal Player plays the game of existence in limitless modes and every one of them (the modes) is beautiful: Notes which the Flute plays are manifold, but none of them is false: the feelings are many and every one of them is true. The material body must decay and dwindle and man must die, even the individual consciousness or personality must go. Out of the unseen, universal sea of life and consciousness new lives, not the old ones, like new waves must constantly be emerging. Were it not so there would be eternal stagnation. Happily, Death maintains in the universe a freshness that moves on and knows no stoppage, and with its mystery keeps even the soul allured !

(4) That, nobody can cease from work, that its skill lies in doing it rationally, but that the strength comes from the contemplative state: "it is thy power gives me strength to act."

There is one thing however that individualizes Tagore: it is his conception of Personality. What constantly arrested Tagore was the simple fact of 'awareness' through which alone he knew that 'he was' and that there was this world with its ever shifting multitudinous colours and movements, joys and sorrows. Human consciousness was for him the starting-point of all philosophical enquiry and he came to the realisation that at the centre of all sat, like the soul behind all, 'Awareness'. He realised that what gave meaning and purpose to

Reality, that through which It knew Itself was "awareness". So he conceived of Reality as a Personality.

The Ultimate Reality may be anything—personal or impersonal, but at least the poet achieves his contact with It only through his feelings, through his heart's surge and upheaval; his experience at least is that the Ultimate Reality too is longing to make contact with man's heart: It is Personal. He had the sensational experience that in a wide sea of consciousness every single object was in love with every other object and that the Vast One too was in love with everything that existed in It. The core of Tagore's life is his feeling of an awareness dwelling within existence and accosting you everywhere as a veritable Person. Tagore, moved by an intensity of feeling which is so often welling up in his heart, projects his self, outwards as it were, with a longing to go close to and embrace everything, and when he does so he discovers, to his amazement, a similar longing in every object, phenomenon and creature to come close to his heart, as if through all a Person was peeping.

The infinite in its unbounded, cosmic and supracosmic awareness is the Being—the one supreme Person; the Infinite limited in the finite consciousness is the individual person. The Person in the Infinite is ever longing to feel Itself and be aware of Itself in the individual person—'The

Universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique'—, and the individual person is similarly yearning to realise the highest awareness and the deepest feeling in the universal Person. This is the eternal hide and seek between the lover and the beloved which Tagore had known in moments of illumination. The Person hides himself behind Nature, but Nature betrays Him; He goes into the human heart, but the heart discloses him: 'We make God our beloved, and of the beloved our God'—a bewildering and bewitching fusion of mysticism and naturalism.

But this supreme Person is no anthropomorphic God. No doubt Tagore addresses, as a Vaishnava or Christian devotee would do, many of his songs to a personal God as it were; but that was as a result of those rare moments of experience when, in the inmost recesses of his consciousness, in the realm of the profound and the intense feeling, Tagore suddenly found himself confronted with a form; when consciousness was worked up to such a purple heat of feeling, that out of it issued the hoped-for Form—, the Poet seeing infinity reflected in Its eyes, and eternity resting on Its brows. It was in such moments that the one conscious Reality, the impersonal and the infinite became, as if by a sudden transformation in the poet's vision, finite and personal—the adorable God of the moment, the poet's Jivandevata, the stay and support of his life, the beloved, lover, father and friend of his songs. The feeling of the presence of this Person who is at once particular and Universal, limited and

Limitless, purusha and Purushottama, consciousness and Supraconsciousness, possesses Tagore. He also realizes that the Supreme is 'essentially' beauty, love, harmony and delight and that 'consciousness embodied in man' (Chetna, Person) is not to be suppressed; this consciousness is to be opened to the truest of knowledge; it is to intensify into the deepest of love and the highest of harmony : symbolically speaking, it is to touch the Supreme Person,—the Infinite. The waste of life lies in beauty not seen and love and harmony not realized, while its fulfilment, even God's fulfilment, lies in love, beauty and harmony realized in a human heart. The cuckoo is cooing in the bower—the world is blooming; would you like man to besmear his body with ashes and close his eyes to this wonder ? Tagore's life was a spontaneous and loving endeavour to increase his awareness of this wonder of existense and realize its essence. Moving through this world of time and space, of blightedness and brightness, and experiencing life's joys and sorrows he yet succeeded in his experiential and creative moments to transcend his little consciousness and see the splendour of the world and through it the face of the Eternal Beloved, of whose beauty he was so much enamoured that away from the sight of it his heart knew 'no rest nor respite.'

CHAPTER SIX

RHYTHM, HARMONY AND MUSIC

The language of harmony in Nature is the mother-tongue of our own soul.*

"Through art the human creator puts himself in step with the rhythm of the universe", the Vedic seers had said. And Tagore, being the priest of the ritual of art, 'cultures his soul, makes it rhythmic'; perceives the ancient link of the creative throb of his soul with cosmic creation itself: Rhythm, harmony and music in Tagore's poetry is the rhythm, harmony and music not only of his soul, but also of the soul of the universe. Once, gazing on the sinking sun casting its mournful light on the silent earth he had felt that,

> "with a little steadfast concentration of effort we can, for ourselves, translate the grand harmony of light and colour which permeates the universe into music. We have only to close our eyes and receive with the ear of the mind the vibration of this overflowing panorama."

Music and harmony of the soul of universe was not a fanciful idea with Tagore, but it was an intuitive perception; his affiliations with the cosmic cadenzas were inwardly born. He had had an experience of a peace pervading at the substratum of all existence and realized that

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* Tagore : *Creative Unity*, Macmillan.

> ‘the same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measure’,†

and consequently known the affinity of his being with the being of all existents—animate and inanimate—, and of the universe as a whole. He serves the religion of the artist by finding out, as he himself says, ‘the inner concordance of a thing with its outer surroundings of all things.’ And further, the music that issues from Tagore could not be, if already there were no music in the soul of the Supreme Person:

> "The great master plays; the breath is his own, but the instrument is our mind through which he brings out the songs of creation." *

How is song born in the poet ? It is thus:

> ‘At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.’

And this utterance ineffable has the ring which harmonizes the heart of man, and draws tears out of its depth. Tagore sought God as Beauty revealed by Harmony: In the rhythmic footfall behind the cosmic motion he saw the face of Beauty; and he was most himself only when he was aware of it. The 'person' within him was not detached from the universe around.

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† From *Gitanjali*, Song 69.

* From *Personality*, Macmillan.

It does not mean that he refused to see life's discordances and disharmonies. He had his personal worries—"I have suffered not a few sorrows in my life"—, he was deeply pained at the poverty of the people at home and at what was happening in the world at large; he had also the realization that as in man's smile God himself smiles, so in man's poverty, disease, dirt and ignorance, God Himself feels miserable. Tagore does not evade the question by dismissing them (pain and suffering) as mere maya or illusion; rather, for him, they are realities involved in the very process of creation. "The question", says Tagore, "why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or in other words, why there is creation at all." Pain is mother Nature's contrivance of emancipation through striving, her own way of unfolding the essential divine potentialities. "It (pain) is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in life, for our power, our wisdom, our love;... ....in pain is symbolized the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy." Despite this religious explanation for the inevitability of pain in life, Tagore, religiously human—seeing in man's poverty God's own wretchedness—as he was,did earnestly wish that suffering should not exist anywhere in the world and that without waiting upon God's intervention social efforts must be made to remove it; still, he couldn't clearly visualize the historical process that would end it, and if at all he visualized it, it was late in life, * and he could not make it the central inspiration of his poetry.

In fact his was the genius of a different nature. Rather than with socio-historical drab it rested with 'an immediately apprehended coherence of life', with the intrinsic harmony of existence, although for him this harmony was never static, rather, it was perpetually in the process of realization in the very interplay of the opposites. He was firmly settled in the feeling that from joy the world is born, into joy it returneth. Love, he found in all, the rich as well as the poor, and so also he found in all, a capacity to enjoy themselves, a capacity to live an hour of harmony. He had seen poor paddy-field workers gathered after the day's hard labour under the starlit sky and playing on their 'Ektara' life's sweet and doleful airs, and singing deeply and heartily. Wasn't there something in them which could not only forget but transcend (though only temporarily—'but even after return within the prison world, an echo lingers in the ear, an exaltation in the mind') their day-to-day misery and suffering ? It is this something—the uplifted awareness transcending the separative self and entering into the world heart's harmony—that possesses Tagore's soul. His experience of the

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* Tagore in his *Letters from Russia*, 1930, writes: My greatest regret is that I haven't the 'faculty of youth. I stay behind, inert, in the caravensarai; I can no longer keep pace with those who have gone ahead."

transcendent feeling had so deeply enthralled his being that he could never escape his primary impression of the world as the primal playground of the eternal Child, and that even in the hour of greatest affliction he could in holy faith and heart's certitude say:

> Cripple me if you will
> Shut out all light from my eyes,
> Shroud me in the shadow of infirmity,
> yet in the dilapidated temple of my being
> the ancient god will remain enthroned.
> Work your havoc and pile up the wreck
> yet in the midst of this ruin
> the luminous spot of inward joy
> will burn bright as ever.

His was not the poetic world of sociological phenomena, of rattling trains or whirring planes; of captains, corporals or sergeants; of bugles, bands and drum-majors; of factories and labour furies; of cranes and cargoes; of the rush, throngs, lights and houses that are London, Moscow or Rome; nor is it Shakespeare's world of intensely wrought up passions, nor Eliot's "Wasteland"; but it is a world of cool light, green shade and sweet reticence; of the dark masses of cloud spreading a purple shadow on the distant rain-dimmed forest; of the duet of colours under the sun-set sky; of the pollen of the mango-blossom and the dew-cooled fragrance of the 'sephalika'; of the twittering of the 'doyal' in the early dawn; and of the rapturous touch of the beloved. It is essentially a world of delicate colours, soft voices and ineffable feelings; even the expression is soft and unobtrusive: It is the world of a Chinese painter's landscape. We find in him not a poet of the Sturm and Drang of life but of its serenity and harmony; we hear in him not the rock'n roll music but the deep-toned 'Bhairavi' or the sweet-melodied 'Malhar'. It was a higher harmony that inspired him. In, through and beyond the spatio-temporal 'halchal' (movement) he had the apprehension of a Presence, and he could say:

> "The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on."

Not only the spirit that his poems enshrine is musical but there is music also in the very setting of the word-sounds, whose harmonies issue directly from the harmony of his soul, like harmonies of movement urging themselves through the limbs of a born dancer. Verses, and whole poems in many cases, are so conceived that their sonority—correlated sounds—alone conveys ideas, moods and emotions. In his own native language he has been an innovator of a thousand new tunes and cadences, which can be heard in the silence of the night from the lonely heart of a widow. They rise also from soldiers stationed in trenches on Death's field. His songs are also on the lips of ferrymen on the Hoogly, of the paddy-growers and reapers in the plains of Bengal and of wayfarers on life's endless road. Besides, he has been an originator of a new type of musical, poetic prose in English, clearly distinguishable by its easy and graceful flow from Whitman's cumbersome long lines on the one hand, and from the enigmatic verse libre of the ultra-moderns on the other. W. B. Yeats was highly impressed with the musical quality of his English poems; Ezra Pound discovered in them a music which is both a subtle overflow and a most intricate combination of very real sounds and harmonies. To another critic the marvellously musical and rhythmic lines of the *Gitanjali* 'disclosed a hitherto unrevealed subtlety of fascination in the English language with delicate nuances of the poet's own touch.' The greatest charm of Tagore's poetry, however, is that it breathes the air of the sweet Ineffable.

The meaning and music of Tagore's poems and songs is not hidden from common man's view by any esoteric veil, rather, unlike much mystical poetry it directly bears what is human, deeply human, and goes home simply and easily to the human heart. Would you call this poetry spiritual or human ? Strictly speaking you can't denominate it in any way, except that it is pure poetry—a response in verbal harmony, of a deeply apperceptive sensibility to the fact of existence. Like the finite and the infinite meeting in the cosmic play, the spiritual and the human mingle inextricably in Tagore's poetry, and the reader, without the need of taking the trouble of knowing one from the other, is simply held by a feeling that touches him in his depths. All elements in Tagore roll into one wondrous whole, into a grand symphony where one cannot mark the poetic from the mystic, the romantic from the realistic, the religious from the philosophic, and all these from music or harmony. Even his paintings are no other than versification in lines, a harmony of colours which, originating in the poet's own instinct for rhythm, rise to the condition of music. Verily,

> "Music fills the infinite between two souls. This has been muffled by the mist of our daily habits."

Clear the mist and you will hear the music ringing clearly in Tagore's poetry.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GITANJALI

(Quintessence of Contents)

Here, issuing directly out of the depths of the poet's soul are a hundred various notes,—man's craving for God, God's craving for man, the poignant sweetness of seeking, the wonder and pity of world's existence, the mystery of life, love, death and the Beyond—but all ultimately striving and rising towards one Peak:

> " From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee." *(Gitanjali, 75)**

The first song embodies the poet's experience (of one morning) that the Supreme Person is expressing himself endlessly through the individual. This play of the Infinite trying to realize Himself in the finite is perpetual. At the same time it is only when an individual is touched by the Infinite that he can come out with a truly inspired word. It is through the 'Sadhana' of song that the poet comes before the Lord; while in the background the cosmic music goes eternally on; the poet listens to it in silent amazement and longs to be in tune with it (2-3). He realizes that since the touch of his Master's hand is ever upon him he should always strive to be pure in body, thought and feeling. The poet realizes that when awareness heightens, ordinary things begin to look wonderful, but as soon as he loses touch with higher intensities,—away

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* Numerical figures indicate the numbers of the poems as given in Tagore's works published by Macmillan & Co.

> "Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil,"—(4-5).

In a mood of utter resignation to his Master, the poet advises himself to leave all his burdens "on his hands who can bear all", and to "Accept only what is offered by sacred love."—9. In songs 10 and 11 the poet seeks to see God in the humble and the lowliest and challengingly declares that He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and the pathmaker is breaking stones. But then in another moment and in another mood he wants to be assured whether his Master exists at all or not; and through tears comes the assurance, "I am"; wandering through the outer worlds one has only to reach the inmost shrine of the heart and feel that He is there,—(12).

Poem No. 13 expresses a deep longing in the poet's heart to meet the Lord: There is "The agony of wishing in my heart", but no meeting yet. He is somehow happy that his weak desires are not fulfilled: what more was needed, he asks with a sense of deep gratitude, when this sky and the light, this body and life, and the mind to know and feel were there ?—14. There is a free, creative mood in which he says, "My useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose,"–15. Songs 16 and 17 are songs of self-surrender: "I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands". Then in a matchless flow of musical words (in song 18), the poet's heart bursts out complaining like the eternal Radha (woman) to eternal Krishna (man):

> " If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours."

The poet then happens to hear the notes of a far-away song and his body is thrilled. It is in fact the Infinite out on a starry night on its journey of love,—the Cosmic Pilgrim's progress—seeking to realize Itself in the heart of some individual. But only rarely does the Pilgrim succeed, sometimes centuries elapse. The poet at least has thrown open the gates of his house and prays that the Beloved may not pass by like a dream,—22 & 23. The Infinite does come and does touch man, but he, the poor one, wakes not and misses the sight of Him,—26. There is something that stirs in the heart: "I know not what this is that stirs in me"; and he yearns to find Light. He wants to be free and to meet the Lord; but to be able to do so the ego must be transcended. The poet's aspiring soul painfully realizes how difficult it is; man is busy building the ego-wall of shams around him and is always losing sight of his true goal; his little self and his desires are always dragging him down, but even then "Thy love for me still waits for my love". God's love for man is so deep and passionate ! So the poet's prayer is not for complete dissolution in the Universal; the prayer rather is that some trace of the separate self be left in him so that he may feel love's sweet intensity in his own individual heart, 27-34. No. 35 is a patriotic song, praying that his country—his soul—may awake into the heaven of freedom. But daily trifles and poverty of feelings are always obstructing man's natural freedom and gaiety, so the poet's heart rings with a call to his Master, 'Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart'–36. Then from the depths of the poet's soul rises the cry—I want thee only thee. Says he—

> "As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry—'I want thee, only thee' "—

a great simile which only a true poet could conceive; one that removes the veil off our customary vision and obliges us to see beauty. Again when the poet's heart is dried up with dire despair and the day frowns, the poet's prayer is

> Let the cloud of grace bend low from above like
> the tearful look of the mother on the day of
> the father's wrath,—(40)

here, a whole world of beauty has been condensed in a single verse, the divine and the deeply human, both merging in a vivifying poetic simile.

Then comes a song full of the deepest yearning of the beloved's heart for her lover. Waiting with a longing look for Him alone who is hidden behind the passing shows of the world, she, in silence; says:

> "I sit like a beggar maid, drawing my skirt over
> my face, and when they ask me what it is I want,
> I drop my eyes and answer them not.........
>
> "I sit on the grass and gaze upon the sky
> and dream of the sudden splendour of thy coming—
> all the lights ablaze, golden pennons flying over thy car,...
>
> But time glides on and still no sound of the wheels of thy chariot. Many a procession passes by with noise and shouts and glamour of glory. Is it only thou who wouldst stand in the shadow silent and behind them all ? And only I who would wait and weep and wear out my heart in vain longing ?—41

It is poetry, silent and unobtrusive, and yet speaking of a whole world of feelings, where Mystery's heart grows deeper still, and there is no end in view to the agony of a love-lorn soul. Does the meeting really ever take place ? You can't know. Perhaps only the poet's heart in transcendence knows. The depth of his feelings is so unfathomable, their subtlety so intactile, and the music of the verses embodying them so ineffable.

In the next song Life, Love, Death and

Eternity are put in a juxtaposition : Is the time not yet come, quietly asks the poet, when "we should sail in a boat, only thou and I", to no country, to no end ? Song 43, expresses the poet's experience of the tryst of Eternity with the moment, of the Universal with the individual: (and the room where they meet is the man's heart)—

> "......entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowed, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeing moment of my life..."—43.

The touch is gone, there is waiting again, waiting for that lightning flash which will show the poet the face divine; an expectation; a hope:

> " I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see."—44.

Then is heard an unexpected sound: It is the sound of God's footsteps coming from afar; the poet feels in the air a faint smell of His presence, God's messenger enters his heart and calls him in secret, and at last when the poet wakes from slumber and opens his eyes he sees Him standing by and flooding his sleep with smile. The poet's belief is that the path to Him is not long and wearisome like the arduous path of yoga and ceremonies; but it is 'sahaj', Kabir's simple, direct path; it is the poet's path of song-making:

> " One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and......you came down and stopped at my cottage door"—49.

God, the king of all kings, would go only to those who would give their all in love to Him, 50.

Sometimes through the darkness of a stormy night, comes of a sudden, "our king of the fearful night"—whose gift to her bride is "no flower, no spices, nor vase of perfumed water", but a dreadful sword (symbolic of spiritual puissance) which shines like the pure flame of being burning up earthly sense with one fierce flash; the bride must accept it embracingly, give up coyness, doll's decoration, sweetness of demeanour, give up all fear, and the fear of death in life, if she wants to win her lover 52, 53. The song 54 outlines a simple picture: a woman with a water-pitcher, on her way home from the well, meets a thirsty traveller and allays his thirst. He asks her name. She stands speechless, only asking what she had done for him to deserve remembrance. Here again is . ineffable poetry: it seems as if two pure consciousnesses, shorn of all ego-sense, stood facing each other in full confidence of identity in feeling. Here is the divine touch; for where else is divinity if not in the inmost core of a pure, simple feeling ? To the poet comes the experience (song 55) that across dust and heat, anxiety and sorrow,

> " At the end of the stony path, in the country of virgin solitude, my friend is sitting all alone,"

sitting all alone in the depth of the heart. To the poet comes the knowledge that it is in man's heart and in the world that God realizes his being, his potentialities and virtues :

> "O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not ?"—56

Poems, 57, 58 and 59 express the soul's experience of having been flooded with divine light and joy and love—

> ' the light dances at the centre of my life'; 'mirth spreads from leaf to leaf '; 'Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart'......;

while the next three, namely, 60, 61 and 62, embody the spirit of *The Crescent Moon* child poems.

Now comes a group of poems (mainly 63 to 72) bearing the note of the unceasing interplay of the finite and the Infinite:

> "The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me."—71.

The Infinite's joy is in becoming the finite and finite's proud boast is that in its blood is dancing the life-throb of ages. This phenomenon of the finite and the infinite seeming as two distinct things is, in a way, a glimmering illusion only, because Reality after all is One, containing in itself both the finite and the infinite. But then what is the way to deliverance from this illusion ? The poet's way is not renunciation: even in a thousand bonds of delight, the poet feels the embrace of freedom (73) : only that his heart may not lose touch with the deeps of Existence, 'with the allness of the universe'–

> "Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many."—63

After the first hint at the call from Death (song 74), the poet passes into a self-resigned, pensive mood and seems to be more anxious than ever—as age has been advancing and there has been no meeting yet—to seize Reality, (Poems 75 to 89). Sometimes, in the deepest silence of night, he feels that 'She' sits deep within the heart and vain is the seeking for her, and realisation slowly dawns that peace and perfection are in the depth of Existence. Sometimes he feels that it is the heart's sorrow, the pang of separation in the cosmos's heart as well as in the individual's, that is man's most precious possession, and that it is this sorrow that becomes 'lyric among nestling leaves' and 'melts and flows in song'. Through his personal sorrow—the wife's loss (Poem 87), he reaches Truth:

> ' But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door.'

The sight of a ruined temple (symbolic) in a desolate place brings to the poet a moment of larger apprehension, and he looks far into the region of deathless oblivion—a something that passes understanding and inspires awe.

In poems from 90 to 103, the last of this 'Song Offering', the poet conveys in illuminating images and charming word-rhythms his vision of death as affecting man and rousing in him deep and varied sensations. The poet does not dismiss it as falsehood but faces it as a fact of existence, looks upon it as Guest, as the wedding ceremony uniting him to the beloved Beyond, as a profound Presence,—the poet's voice rising to awe–inspiring sublimity in the lines:

> " Now, when the playtime is over, what is this sudden sight that is come upon me ? The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars," (97)

and ending with the final prayer:

> " Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.
>
> Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee."

In these hundred and odd songs, or lyrical poems, one could naturally expect as many different thoughts or feelings or experiences. But no. The impression is that they are only so many different tunes singing repeatedly as it were the same thought, the same feeling, the same experience. Very little seems to be solid or substantial—no real landscape, no explicit picture of life, no 'history' of the age, no story,—even no philosophy. They don't describe, don't narrate, don't offer ideas; they don't even give the satisfaction of certainties found, of questions answered (which if you want, look up Scriputre which, fortunately, *Gitanjali* is not) or even the pleasure of rhetory, unaggressive like softer melodies as they are. They seem only to sing, softly vibrate and move; and meanwhile, a moment unwittingly has come of the stirring up of the inner springs of our being: The word and the meaning, the music and the experience, have blended into identity, impressing the moment with the virtue of eternity: The poems give you only the joy of the journey, not the satiation of arriving at the destination, only sharpen the pain of your heart (if you already happen to have any) not show you the face of the Beloved; only deepen the mystery for you not lead you out of it. They don't equip you with any message for life but may, at moments, only direct your eye to a flash of beauty or your ear to some far off melody. That's all.

In fact *Gitanjali's* is a world of feeling that exists behind the visible appearance of man, a world deep and subtle, a world where in secret the Lover clasps to his heart the Beloved and the Infinite is tete-a-tete with man, a world of mysterious whisperings and of a myriad unsaid things. The songs of *Gitanjali* are songs mainly of the closest personal connection between the poet and the Eternal, as lover and Beloved, wife and Husband, servant and Master, friend and Friend, as if the poet were trying to approach Reality in a personal way—through personal relationship. They are songs constructing out of themselves their own wondrous world in which dawns and eves and langrous moons, vagrant tints of the skies and glorious horizons, flowers and birds, beggar-maids, pilgrims and messengers with tidings—man and nature—jostle with one another and unite at a point in the inner heart of the poet and raise there paeons of love and longing for the 'ever-far' and yet the 'ever-near' Master of the Whole. The songs are there not to be intellectually understood, but to be heard and felt by the heart within; awareness is stirred by them to sense the touch of someone from afar.

Would you dismiss it as romantic or mystical illusion ? Friend ! it is no illusion. It is the most real of realities—making you aware of your own existence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

OTHER POETICAL WORKS

(Quintessence of Contents)

THE GARDENER

Most of the poems and songs of *The Gardener* "were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named Gitanjali."* They are lighter but not less fresh; their intensely musical quality made Ezra Pound write to his countrymen: "One must read each poem as a whole and then reconceive it as a song, of which you have half forgotten the cords." ın these lyrics—the maiden's eye, the flower in the garden, the lonely star in the evening sky,—all mingle freely and intimately; no inhibitons, no restraints, no body high or low. It is a wondrous world; and mind, it is not of the hereafter, not of the beyond; but it is this very world, on this very earth, of this very life. There are the village lanes, straying friends meeting together, two pairs of eager eyes begging for music, the glow of the funeral pyre, the cry of the jackals, smiles sweet and simple, sly twinkle in the eye, jingling bracelets—the whole world. They all have need of the poet; the poet attends to them, weaves passionate songs for them; he has no time to brood over the life hereafter. He would accept to be nothing else but a gardener in the Queen's garden—a singer of the joys and sorrows of man in this blooming, flowering world. Reader ! this world has the power to carry you with it,—this poet's world. You hear in it Love's song bursting out into hundred tunes; witness Love's visitations set in the changing moods of the Bengal seasons, of its dawns and eves, noontides and nights, while birds chirp and doves coo, and the world's business goes on. The song is not tumultuous; it flows like flower exhaling fragrance. Love's calls come: They come in a hundred moods—in hesitation, in tears, in flattering smiles, in sweet coyness when she does not say 'yes', does't say, 'She is I', although she loves. The call comes whispering through despair and hope, through eager looks or cruel glances, through doubts and misunderstandings, and in a thousand other ways—hands clinging to hands, eyes lingering upon eyes and the bird of soul souring in the heaven of eye; it comes travelling alone through ages and lands, sometimes borne on the tide of happiness, sometimes sitting on its own throne and playing the tyrant, sometimes concealed beneath flashes of laughter to hide its own tears.

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* Tagore's own note in the preface to *The Gardener.*

Here is a situation (one among many) in this world of Love: The Prince passes by the door of the maid and yet takes no notice of her (the story of love is so enveloped in mystery !); the maid loves and loves and surrenders, and yet the Prince takes no notice;—only the vanishing strain of the flute comes sobbing to her from afar. Another situation:—'Woman' walks by the riverside path with the full pitcher upon her hip. She swiftly turns her face and peeps at 'man' through her fluttering veil. That gleaming look from the dark comes upon him like a breeze that sends a shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadowy shore, and man cries: "You are hidden as a star behind the hills, and I am a passer-by upon the road." It is real rural Bengal, man, woman, poetry, the elusive mystery of existence, and love that one can't escape.

Then witness the free abandon of love between man and woman, when love's intensity is all in all and there is no looking before or after,

> No mystery beyond the present; no striving for the impossible; no shadow behind the charm; no groping in the depth of the dark. This love between you and me is simple as a song.

But the moment of free abandon, after all, passes away, soul's ancient moaning returns and one has to look to the Great Beyond :

> I am listless, I am a wanderer
> in my heart.
> In the sunny haze of the
> languid hours, what vast vision
> of thine takes shape
> in the blue of the sky !

O Farthest End, O the keen
call of thy flute !

It is the Beyond no doubt, but It mingles up with this world as Its own, enticing its inhabitants to accepting the heart's holy pain.

A last few poems in *The Gardener* convey Tagore's profound apperception of the one tie of love that links up all inanimate nature, beast and man.

THE CRESCENT MOON

"I used to become the child-poet, going back to my childhood"……in these words of the poet himself lies the secret of the birth of *The Crescent Moon*, which, on publication "was felt to be a revelation of a child's mind, comparable to the best that any language had seen." The poet pours all the love of his heart on the child, doesn't mind if the child busy in its play with its playmates has no time or thought for the poet-Papa. The poet has sublime pictures of the child's fancy which has its own boats to sail across the seven seas, its own wings to soar to the stars. The child loves colour and toys, and when tired goes into the lap of the mother and sleeps. The smile that flickers on its lips is the same that lies at the edge of a vanishing cloud touched by a young pale beam of a crescent moon; and the sweet soft freshness that blooms on its limbs is the same that lay pervading the mother's heart in tender and silent mystery of love when she was a young girl. The child's is a gorgeous, colourful, yet simple and joyous world—a wonderful world, full of the pathos, and sunshine of the children's hearts. The poet in fact sees in them the joy and primordiality of existence. Incarnations of the spirit of existence, the children meet on the seashore of endless worlds with shouts and dances. The poet, further, carries us beyond the child's mind into a deep and mystic world. The child's play and the cosmic play are brought together on the same plane. When the child dances with its bamboo stick in its hand like a tiny little shepherd,... the world carries away in glee the twinkling of its anklet bells; the sun smiles and watches its toilet;—and He who plays his music to the stars stands at its window with his flute.

Most of the poems in *The Crescent Moon* were inspired by the poet's own young son and daughter, and they were offered to them in holy devotion as to a Holy Spirit, and in all selflessness, as if the children had hired the poet with nothingness. This poetry was conceived in those regions of the heart where existence is felt in its purity. From there, angelic, gentle eyes of the child fall upon the clamours and conflicts of this world like 'forgiving' peace, appealing, as it were, to the world to come to sanity.

HUNDRED POEMS OF KABIR

These are translations into English poetic prose of the songs of Kabir, a great mystical poet of India, giving a fresh and spontaneous expression to "his intense conviction of the soul's intercourse with the Tanscendent". I think Tagore has fully succeeded in conveying to us the true charm of

Kabir's "unstruck Music of the Infinite", which he could not have done unless he himself had had some apprehension of the Infinite and found himself in complete sympathy with Kabir's vision and thought. Both Tagore and Kabir are poets and mystics, but with a difference. While one was modern, the other was medieval, one profoundly learned, the other unlettered; and while one could claim only stray intimations from the Beyond, the other was a saint with a direct vision of God. Tagore's translations are, in a sense, his homage to the greatness of Kabir, and a service to the Western world, inasmuch as he made known to it in its own language the sublime flights of a mighty soul into the Unknown, who is brought down as the loving and beautiful One.

FRUIT-GATHERING

While in *The Gardener*, the Poet in the freshness of his youth was mainly wreathing, as the Queen's gardener, flower-garlands for her, he brings a deeper tone into the songs of *Fruit-Gathering*. At the end of its flowering youth his life was now like a fruit "waiting to offer herself completely with her full burden of sweetness",—2. There was gorgeousness in the poet's life, but it was also pervaded by an expansive holiness which was constantly turning him to "the seven wise stars" and to the hills' high summits to read the meaning of the Infinite's "Unread letter," which he had found one morning on waking. The poet has heard the call of the eternal Stranger; the sound of his footfall knocks at his heart; it pains him but urges him at the same time to leave the self's prison of decay, and rush towards the morning sun for the freedom of light.

The wonder and mystery of the phenomenon of separate self-conscious beings being thrown up by one undifferentiated cosmic stuff, and of the why and wherefore of it, with all the implied depths of meaning, finds expression in one of the "boldest and strongest, yet most natural metaphor in the world"

> When the child leaves the womb it sees its mother. When thy affection covers me, I lie hidden in its entrails and then I know thee not. When thou dost with violence thrust me far from thy shelter, in that separation I find consciousness, I see thy Face. *

Really, were man not thrust apart from God how could he ever see His face, could ever know that a world existed ? Generally man's genius remains unrealized, his life narrow, but once he is touched by His breath, i. e. by the higher and wider consciousness, he can no more desire 'to glide by the shelter of the bank' : He then spreads 'a reckless sail to the wind and rides the turbulent water.' But how is man to receive His touch ? He who

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* Prof. Thompson's translation of the corresponding lines in song No. 22 of the poet's *Balaka*. The poet's own free translation as incorporated in song No. 10 of *Fruit-Gathering* is a little different.

throws his doors open and steps onward receives His greeting,—13: he who kindles the 'Pain of Love' in his heart is embraced by Him,—24. The lamp of the ego would not do, the divine Fire shall have to be invoked to light the path and to win His grace. For, it is not for man to open buds into blossoms, it is He alone at whose breath 'the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the wind'—(18).

Tagore's moods and musical strains are as varied as the moods and voices of Nature. How could one confine him to one single 'idea' ?—(And still the basic note of the organ is ever the same). In one mood he wishes to fathom the 'fathomless silence'; in another he wishes to waken the Pain of Love asking, as it were, was it not the pain of love that caused the first stir in the primal silence and started the process of creation (evolution) ? And is it not the pain of love that sends a streak of light through the dark, sleeping heart and imparts to it the meaning of life ? Like his moods his experiences too are varied: He realizes that the kingdom of heaven is gained when all possessions have been laid aside:

> "—raise me from the still gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of uncrowded presence";

discovers that the Divine has a terrifying aspect too; sees the mystic flash of the ray divine:

> "The wall breaks asunder, light, like divine laughter
> bursts in.
> Victory, O Light"—(Song 39);

feels the sensation of the first stirring out of the Infinite across the vast deep of the void to meet the "She,"—Maya, to shape out creation; is poetically inspired to raise the singular figure of the Boatman (poem 41) venturing out on a stormy night with only the burden of a white rose—the eternal Lover with nothing but a pure heart—to meet her whose name is unknown but who 'Through the howl of the winds—hears him call her name'; is further inspired to tell the story of the Eternal One, becoming two,—story of the Infinite becoming woman—Maya, and Maya ever crying:

> "When will my beloved come whom I know not,
> and be known to me for ever ?" (56—57);

suffers the tragic feeling of man growing in age and resignedly praying to the Unknown to let him feel His touch "along the lengthening stretch of my loneliness."

Then there are ideas subconsciously felt and metaphorically embodied in various poems. Poem No. 62 expresses the idea that the Infinite is manifest even in the tiniest object of this creation: it is not only the sky that can hold the Sun, even a dew drop does it. Poems 68 and 69 embody the realization that the Eternal is expressing and singing nothing but the thoughts and feelings of the individual consciousness. No. 70 is a subtle and lovely allegory of the Infinite and the finite showing and shadowing each other. 72 is a 'passionate paean of praise for body',—because the body has housed the light of awareness. In 74 the metaphor of the horse eager to run to win the kingdom of light is striking and revealing. Poem 77 enshrines the idea of man being indispensable to God, the idea to which he turns repeatedly in his works—

> "Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart, and you find your love carven into the image of my life,"—

as though the Universal Consciousness could enjoy this creation only through the awareness embodied in the individual. No. 78 is a subtle symbolic expression of the poet's realization that in man alone at the crest of the process of evolution is the self-conscious God enshrined:

> "To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return.........To all things else you give; from me you ask,"

as if God were seeking realization of His own yet unmanifest powers in man. The same idea finds a fuller and more poetic expression in poem 80. The creation was purposeless till man appeared on the scene and the Master of creation knew Himself in him. The poet says to his Master:

> You did not know yourself when you dwelt alone,...
> I came and you woke,......
> I came and your heart heaved; pain came to you
> and joy.

> You touched me and tingled into love
> I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight of me, the thirst that cries at my door in the repeated knockings of sunrise.

No. 81 expresses the thought that although all that is is God, His essence lies in the inmost consciousness of man : 'your heaven is in my secret heart'. 83 (1) is also in the same strain : 'I feel that all the stars shine in me.' Without the poet having some mystic apprehension of this divine secret such poetry would not be possible. No. 84 entitled "The Oarsmen," written in the mid-throe of the First World War, is powerful in its hatred of the arrogance of the strong and denunciation of the cowardice of the weak, but, more than that, it is sublime in picturing the creative-cum-destructive dance of Nature, and, in its impact on man leading him to feel that when the nutshell of the ego breaks, the Boundless is revealed.

STRAY BIRDS

It contains 325 small, aphoristic poems (each 2 to 3 lines) composed in the style of dainty Japanese verse during the poet's voyage to Japan and recording his fleeting fancies, some of which are very scintillating. For instance :

> It is the tears of the earth that keep her
> smiles in bloom.

◆

> If you shed tears when you miss the sun, you
> also miss the stars.

◆

> Listen, my heart, to the whispers of the world
> with which it makes love to you.

◆

Be still, my heart, these great trees are prayers.

•

Without the world God would be phantasm; without God, the world would be chaos.

LOVER'S GIFT

The poet is in joyous sympathy with the youthful human heart's aspirations for love; Nature too is in sympathy with the youthful;even the forest hermitage is for the youthful. The poet is as yet far from the touches of the Infinite. His song reaches wherever there are two fluttering hearts (21); his laughter is the tumult of insurgent life; his prayer to his beloved is that she may thank him with her eyes when he stands before her at his leave-taking; for, says he, "The heart is my all at which I perform my life's sacrifice in tears." But a turn comes in the poet's life when the spring-tide of youth is over and he has no flower to offer. The whisper of the ages begins to be recalled as if there were a looker-on who sat behind his eyes (39). Hints of the eternal truth now start coming (40); eyes begin to follow love to the bank of the dark water (41); the search through the dark, inspired by the death of his wife, begins (42); there is prayer for the inner door of the shrine to be opened (45); the old familiar path is lost; the eyes are now lightless pilgrims, seeking the shore of light; feelings are seeking their forms (58); and ultimately love turns into worship: love that is human with a desire for enjoyment, is turned into love that is divine with a feeling of worship; the lover or the beloved finds in the other the God unknown. It is the story of love affecting life in many ways, of how from the beginning has all creation been indulging in one prolonged flirtation.

CROSSING

In *Crossing* the call is heard, but it is not yet known from where,—from the known or from the Unknown. There is man's cry that he be taken across the dark water, a prayer to the steersman that he may hold the helm, to the Lord that he may hear His words in the silence of his soul. The conscious world becomes still with the expectation of his coming; the heart burns with the fire of divine pain; there is an earnest prayer for the hand to be held, since night is dark and the pilgrim blinded; there is a prayer for the morning light in which death and life are to be combined, and a hope that the shroud of darkness will be lifted. Although there is no meeting, it is sweet to watch, to hope, to listen for the footsteps, and to feel the pain of longing; there is a call to the heart to hold its faith firm; sometimes in the evening twilight walks the Unseen Comer causing the heart to tremble, and during night love's play is stilled into worship; the presence of the One who is awake in the throbbing stars of the night, and in the depth of the heart's pain is felt; life and consciousness are not yet altogether lost; the sound of His approching footsteps is heard; the darkening sky deepens the meaning of His presence in the heart; He enters the room of the bride, but is not recognised; she then hears the invocation to follow the torch of the bridegroom through the darkness; she, having sacrificed all, expects to receive his love; she gets a glimpse of Him over the horizon; she will feel His presence in the sudden delight of her heart melting into the sadness of tears; She perceives His purpose in her soul, and still she knows not whether she has found Him or is still seeking Him; she feels His touch in her loneliness; He visits her but remains .unseen, unknown; her heart bends in worship like a dew-laden flower, and she feels the flood of her life rushing to the endless; she has reached the brink of the shoreless sea to take her last plunge and lose herself for ever there; the call to leave the shore and embrace Immensity is heard; she feels she has been freed from the fetters that bind her to the limited, the finite; Night's darkness is broken and from the ramparts of the ruined prison sound the paeans of victory; the Guest comes to the door, and she prepares to leave the house and go out in silence with Him, in loneliness she discovers Him; the whole nature seems to be making obeisance to Him, and she yearns to feel within herself the unlimitedness of His love; she now plays with Him in the silent courtyard of the King's palace; His call sounds at every step, in every object, everywhere; she wishes her life were one with His song; she sees in the dawn, in the spring, everywhere, God's footprints; come what may, she will sail onward, a wayfarer on an endless road ! Is it a loving heart's—a soul's—journey ? Will it ever reach its end ?

THE FUGITIVE

The Fugitive has three sections—the main body of each consisting of songs. As the title implies, the songs were composed in fugitive moods finding expression in shifting musical airs and rhythms and in a multitude of pictures, images and movements. The source, however, of all these fugitive moods is the same,—the poet's intense awareness of the existence of his own self and a deeper apprehension of the world around in which the self moves.

The sight of the changing moods of the skies may perhaps have put the poet in a mood to perceive Reality as fugitive. In one of her aspects she appears to him as the unseen, puissant force behind the cosmic rush which strikes his awareness with awe. He sees her as sweeping darkly on and, as she does so, stagnant space frets into eddying bubbles of light round her; her tangled tresses break into stormy riot and pearls of fire roll along her path as from a broken necklace; her "fleeting steps kiss the dust of this world into sweetness, sweeping aside all waste"; and should she 'in sudden weariness stop for a moment, the world would rumble into a heap'. The poet's 'thoughts are quickened by this rhythm of unseen feet', through his blood 'surges the psalm of the ancient sea', his being breaks out in 'sorrowings and songs', and possessed by the burden of this ineffable wonder his soul begins to yearn like a lover's across his immeasurable loneliness, and 'sail over the unfathomed dark towards limitless light.' The call to the poet 'comes up by ways from the unknown', he must go—but where does he expect to meet the unknown ? He says to his friend:

> I shall follow wind and cloud; I shall follow the stars to where day breaks behind the hills;
> I shall follow lovers who, as they walk, twine their days into a wreath on a thread of song, 'I love.' (I, 2)

The first two songs of *The Fugitive* which are sublime in their vision and carry us along with the powerful sweep of their verses are followed by pieces which are mostly expressions of the different moods of a lover. The moods are the lover's as well as Nature's; the same throb is in the hearts of both.

There are moods of expectancy: 'The hush this evening seems to expect a footfall'; of deep agony: 'I cannot give a reason why I weep, for that is a secret still withheld from me'; of willingness to give up every thing: 'nothing remaining but the desolate triumph of losing all'; of destitution; of holding on to love (as to beauty and to poetry) even if it were an illusion. Then there is the pathetic feeling: alas! I was free and cheerful before I fell in love:

> You have shattered my freedom—and with
> its wreck built your own prison;

in binding the finite, the Infinite too has bound itself. And then once again the sense of the fugitive in Existence:

> "Tell me", the poet asks, "what you do on this
> bank so dry that it is agape with cracks ?"
> "Nothing, nothing whatsoever",...she says.
> "Tell me, for whom do you wait ?"
> "No one, no one at all."

The eleventh piece is the famous poem, "Urvashi"—the heavenly dancer. As conceived by Tagore she is not merely a "Dweller in Paradise", "adored by the king of the Gods"—a figure of mythology. Tagore, rather, in a moment of poetic rapture visioned her as the cosmic Spirit of life in the mazes of an eternal dance, as Beauty embodied in the physical form of woman, and as that world-enchanting Love which moves the sun and other stars. It is a sublime vision which flows out in words and rhythms which are sheer poetry. Here are some lines:

> "When you dance before the gods, flinging orbits of novel rhythm into space, Urvashi, the earth shivers, leaf and grass, and autumn fields heave and sway; the sea surges into a frenzy of rhyming waves; the stars drop into the sky—beads from the chain that leaps till it breaks on your breast; and

> the blood dances in men's hearts with sudden turmoil.
>
> "You are the first break on the crest of heaven's slumber, Urvashi, you thrill the air with unrest. The world bathes your limbs in her tears; with colour of her heart's blood are your feet red; lightly you poise on the wave-tossed lotus of desire, Urvashi; you play for ever in that limitless mind wherein labours God's tumultuous dream."

Urvashi is God's Maya who moves the world. So also is the 'Lady of Manifold Magnificance' (I, II) a restless spirit, endlessly varied and dynamic, pervading the myriad hues, forms and motions of this cosmos, but at the same time the Lady of Silence and Solitude, sitting alone in the 'Unfathomed stillness of the soul'.

The twenty-first piece records the poet's realization that Mind cannot grasp the Spirit. Mind is always saying:

> "Why ask about things that are not ? Take notice of those that are hugely before you,—the struggle and the fight, the army and armaments, the bricks and mortar, and labourers without number."

But as soon as the music in the breeze begins to flow and the light of morning tinges everything with gold, Mind's building is pulled down, and a new consciousness springing up hails the King's herald.

Most of the songs in the second section embody the phenomenon of woman visiting man's soul like a fugitive and stirring it in a hundred ways: A fugitive farewell glance from her becomes the most treasurable wealth; the heart knows of her coming as "the night feels the approach of dawn"; and ancient memories are revived: "I believe you had visited me in a vision before we ever met"; the dark eyes are felt to have belonged "to some unremembered evening sky of a former life"; the heart feels like carrying the kiss within "as the sun carries in its orb the fire of the divine touch and shines for ever" (11). And then slowly comes the realization that:

> "She who is eternally afar is beside you for ever."

An experience still deeper, truer and more naturalistic is :

> "What was sorrow once has now become peace". (27)

The second part closes with a few Baul songs which are symbolic and with which Tagore was in complete spiritual affinity. Here is one singing of the eternal desire of the Infinite to know and feel himself in the finite:

> "This longing to meet in the play of love, my Lover, is not only mine but yours.
>
> Your lips can smile, your flute make music, only through delight in my love, therefore you are importunate even as I." (34)

Section III, contains thirty-five songs giving us glimpses of simple rural scenery and simple human life, at the sight of which the poet exclaims:

> I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world.

There are the kingfisher sitting on the prow of the boat, the cow browsing on the river bank, the buffalo savouring the luxury of cool mud, the dog playing in the sun, the village sleeping at noon, and the poet peeping into the primeval nursery of life, where Mother Earth 'thrills at the first loving clutch near her breast', (10); then there are children, young boys and girls and brothers and sisters frolicking and having a holiday under the blue sky on the bare field near the ruined temple by the ancient tamarind; the little girl at home, saying to her father, "Father, you must not go"; the mother, sitting stricken with grief and hoping that some stir of life may yet touch the awful torpor of the dying son, while the world passes by; the tired mother beating her children who are too many and are rolling on the floor and crying; the maid-servant of forty quarrelling with her mistress but never leaving the house; the boy holding the first letter from his newly wedded wife and the air seeming to take up the cry of the letter, "Love, my love, my sky is brimming with tears"; and then there are the poor man collecting stalks of spear-grass to make brooms for the king's house, and singing unconcernedly "I shall see God, when God himself comes to my door"; the ascetic in the forest, on being offered Paradise, refusing it and asking instead, "I want the girl who gathers twigs"; and Kabir gladly owning God when He comes branded with infamy in the form of a woman.

At the bottom of all these songs lies the poet's sense of the profundity of existence, while at the same time, out in the open is his soul's call for "spring" to burst 'like a rebellion of light, through the night's vigil.' The songs are so wonderfully simple and easy and fugitive that they cannot stand any attempt at analysing or grasping them. We have but to hum them and gather our own honey.

FIREFLIES

Fireflies is a group of exquisite little poems having, in the words of the poet himself, "had their origin in China and Japan when thoughts were often claimed from me in my own hand-writing on fans and pieces of silk." * They are gems of thought and phrase, given out on the spur of the moment as fancy prompted :

My fancies are fireflies
Specks of living light
Twinkling in the dark.

Each of them embodies a delicate picture of nature or an ethical idea expressed in the garb of natural symbolism. A few of those that seem to have sprung direct from depths of poetic consciousness are :

Life sends up in blades of grass
its silent hymn of desire
to the unnamed Light.

●

---

* A note appended to the book by the poet himself.

The centre is still and
silent in the heart of an
eternal dance of circles.

◆

There smiles the divine
child among his play things
of unmeaning clouds and
ephemeral lights and Shadows.

◆

'In the thrill of little leaves
I see the air's invisible
dance, and in their
glimmering the secret
heart-beats of the sky.'

POEMS 1942*

Poems 1942 is a collection of 122 poems including the poet's last ones, arranged in four different sections, each representing a particular phase in the poetic career of Tagore. They were all translated from the original Bengali by the poet himself with the exception of the last nine. This representative collection also confirms the view that a poetico-mystical awareness of existence is the very essence of his being and of all his creative activity.

I conclude this section with a poem of his which has appealed to me as the most piognant and truest cry of the human soul in face of the Great Mystery—

O my life's beloved !
Arduous art thou of realisation.
Of my hart felt sorrow and my inmost feelings,
I shall say nothing.

---

* Published by Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan.

I shall only lay my life and soul
at thy feet,
and thou wilt understand.

Difficult is the path of life,
beset with thorns.
Silently will I go forward,
with thy loving image
enshrined in my heart.

Joy and grief, liking and disliking,
I shall scorn them all.
Whatever thou bestowest upon me
with thine own hands,
that burden I shall cheerfully bear
upon my head.

If I have erred and thou canst not forgive,
Then ordain more and more suffering for me,
if such be thy will, beloved.

But cast me not away,
draw me to thy feet at the day's end.
For thou art all I have,
and the world is encompassed
by the shadow of death.§

---

§ Not included in the above Anthology. Quoted here from 'The Visvabharati Quarterly.'

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silent in the heart of an
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CHAPTER NINE

DRAMAS

(Quintessence of Contents)

CHITRA

Chitra is a sweet lyric drama saturated with poetic raptures and contains some of the sublimest images in literature conceived in inspired moments. It has been built round Tagore's conception of love between man and woman and of woman's personality. Love he regards as a universal feeling which has been co-existent with Existence. Madana, the God of love, in the play says,

> "I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and women !"

The poet further holds that woman's nature is always true to what it is: it is invincible. She, like Chitra of the play, despite all her upbringing and training in warrior's arts and despite her ambition to break lance with the man-warrior Arjuna, easily submits, when time comes, to her native impulse—love. Chitra prays to God, "Give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand." In her unarmed hand is her greatest strength and she conquers; but the wonder is that her conquest always synchronises with her self-surrender, "Take me, take all I am !" In that hour Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merge into one another in an unbearable ecstasy. For woman there is no vista beyond. She is circumscribed by man with none of her own independent path. Her final fulfilment is in keeping by the side of man in his path of danger and daring.

> "If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self",

says Chitra. She finds her completion in man; but man having had the woman, starts dancing again to the drum-beat of battle. The restless Spirit is on him and he must go out 'achieving' in his own way in the wide world. He could afford to go alone, but if a woman has chosen him, she must follow and race on side by side with him, whithersoever he goes.

THE POST OFFICE

It is a lyric and symbolic drama written in a language which 'is of an unsurpassable naturalness'. One may call it even a fairy drama for its young protagonist's innocent belief in real messages being received from the other world. From beginning to end, unlike *Red Oleanders, Sacrifice and other Plays,* it moves on a dreamy, airy plane, seeking to elicit response from one's subtle sense. If one gave such a response, one could be carried aloft by the play to a region of peace which is far above our common, customary, diurnal existence. The play was composed like many a song of the *Gitanjali* when the poet was in an ecstatic mood. It evolves round the poet's spontaneous preference of the child's over the learned man's reaction to existence. The central figure Amal, a young boy, round whom the whole play moves, is, as it were, a young soul "ailing" for self-expresssion in this wide world. He is constantly compelled to remain within the four walls of the house by his uncle Madhav and the Doctor, both of whom can be taken to represent the egoistic, selfish, narrow, and soul-blighting forces in life.

The Doctor: I have already mentioned, on no account must he be let out of doors.

Madhav: Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up.....................

The Doctor: You had better shut this window as well, it's letting in sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.........

Gaffar, the Fakir, and Sudha the flower-girl, embodiment of love and sweetness in life are, on the other hand, in selfless sympathy with Amal, and represent the free, joyous spirit of existence, the spirit which in this wide world plays for the sake of play, and even works in the spirit of play. The dairyman catches this spirit from Amal to whom he says: "......You have taught me how to be happy selling the curds". This state of deliverance and joy in work comes when man, as pointed out by W. B. Yeats in his preface to *The Post Office*, seeking no longer for gains that cannot be assimilated with his spirit, is able to say: "All my work is thine." In this mystic intensity of feeling, therefore, the post-office which has been set up before Amal's house must be taken as merely symbolic: the King of kings is, as it were, constantly assigning work to all his servants in this world, and sending messages from his 'office'. And what work would Amal like to have assigned to him ? In the simplicity of his soul he imagines:

> "I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door."

What more could be God's own ? It is pathetic, however, that Amal gets release ultimately in death only: But death is no terror in Tagore's world. As the ferryman is carrying Amal to the yonder shore,* all his ailing is over and he (Amal) cries :

> "How fresh and open ! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark."

And the right‡ spectar or reader too is borne aloft to 'purer heights' on the wings of imagination provided by the play.

---

* It is recorded by W. B. Yeats in his preface to the play that the deliverance won by the child (Amal) is the same deliverance which rose before Tagore's imagination when once he heard amid the noise of a crowd this line out of an old village song: "Ferryman, take me to the other shore of the river."

‡ W. B. Yeats has affirmed that "to the right audience the play conveys an emotion of Gentleness and peace."

THE KING OF THE DARK CHAMBER

Growing out of the deeps of feeling, this play dramatises the secret dealings of God with the human heart. Symbolism has full play: The king is God, the Queen man's self and the Dark Chamber is the inner heart: in fact, the 'play' itself is of the inmost heart.

> **Surangama** : This room is placed deep down, in the
> very heart of the earth......
> You can meet others in the lighted rooms;
> but only in this dark room can you meet
> your lord.

Even to meet him in his dark room one has to make an approach in utmost humility and resignation. And in fact of truth, while Surangama of inward meekness perceives the Lord when He comes, Sundrashana, the Queen, proud of her love for the king, fails to do so. She asks of Surangama:

> "How can you perceive when he comes ?"

And Surangama explains

> "I cannot say : I seem to hear his footsteps
> in my own heart. Being his servant of
> this dark chamber, I have developed a
> sense—I can know and feel without
> seeing."—

Before one can hope to meet God, one's heart has to offer everything in 'Sacrificial fire', strive through deep sorrow to glimpse His face in the tears of one's eyes and attain to that pitch of inner intensity in which one feels 'My beloved is ever within my heart.' Sudarshan too had to pass through the dark night of her soul—through intense burning and purification of her inner being before she could meet the king. She had to give up the palace chamber and go out on an open road even on a dark night; but she was able to report to Surangama, her soul's companion,

> "What a relief, Surangama, what freedom! It is my defeat that has brought me freedom. Oh, what an iron pride was mine! Nothing could move it or soften it. My darkened mind could not in any way be brought to see the plain truth that it was not the king who was to come, it was I who ought to have gone to him. All through yesternight I lay alone on the dusty floor before that window—lay there through the desolate hours and wept! All night the southern winds blew and shrieked and moaned like the pain that was biting at my heart; and all through it I heard the plaintive "Speak, wife!" of the nightbird echoing in the tumult outside!......It was the helpless wail of the dark night, Surangama!
>
> Surangama : Last night's heavy and melancholy air seemed to hang on for an eternity—oh, what a dismal and gloomy night!
>
> Sudarshana : But would you believe it—
> I seemed to hear the soft strains of the
> vina floating through all that wild din
> and tumult! Could he play such sweet and
> tender tunes, he who is so cruel and terrible?

And after the 'dark' night comes the dawn.

> Surangama : Look, my Queen, there on the eastern horizon comes the dawn.

> **Grand father :** Look, the sky is rosy and crimson from end to end, the air is full of the welcome of the scent of flowers.

The king after all throws open 'the doors of the dark room', giving to the Queen to realize that that which could be camparable with Him lay within herself. In the beginning of the play too, the king had said to her :

> " In my own heart you are no longer the daily individual which yon think you are—you are verily my second-self."—

It is the mystic's unitive experience. But as background to this experience the play presents the whole cosmic commotion—the wondrous story of creation in words of distilled poetry :

> "......the darkness of the infinite heavens, whirled into life and being by the power of my love, has drawn the light of a myriad stars into itself, and incarnated itself in a form of flesh and blood. And in that form, what aeons of thought and striving, untold yearnings of limitless skies, the countless gifts of unnumbered seasons !"

The seer sings out his 'revelation' under the impact of inspiration; it remains for man to apply his mind to make out the meaning of the seer's song, which is so deep and grand and sublime.

THE CYCLE OF SPRING

It is a lyric play, a veritable festival of songs which sometimes achieve "a very pure limpidity." The songs come unpremeditatedly, unburdened with any thought: song for the sake of song. Does the play contain any philosophy ? "No, none at all, thank goodness", that is what one of the characters says in the play. Inspite of that, however, symbolism does intrude: what one can truly hear and feel behind this festival of spring is life's incessant call for joy, for play stripped of all fear, even fear of death, for it is through death that life renews itself. It is the same joy, the same sense of play that lies at the root of God's creation itself. The truth of being is in joy. Joy is the call of the primal spirit, of the poet himself. It has welled out of the realisation that happiness is more important in life than success. The joy of play and the bloom of life are more urgent than any business of life or any round of duties. And still it is not the land of Lotos Eaters, it is a playground where there is incessant activity of the blossoming of the flowers, of the singing of the spring birds, of the poet's music, and of fun and frolic; Old Age is not affeared because it has its own beauties—the queen puts a new garland of white jasmine round its head; Death is no uninvited guest; he too comes and plays, removes stagnance and refreshes everything.

Of this play-world, the Pundit with his wisdom, is the Conservative—the desert sand which tries to dry the stream of life; but the Poet is the high-priest, the Revolutionary, who goes about all day long, initiating the youths in the sacred cult of 'fortuneforsaking' (not fortune-making), giving out the call:

> "Come out, come out into the open world.
> Come out into the highways of life.
> Come out, Ye Youthful Renouncers."

But how is the highway of the open world and not the secluded corner of contemplation the pathway of renunciation ? Why not ?—In the open world all is change, all is life, all is movement. And he who ever moves and journeys with this life-movement, dancing and playing on his flute as he goes, is the true Renouncer. He loses in order to find. He has no faith in the never-changing. But then the practical man complains that there are poverty and suffering in the world to relieve which the poets don't do anything. The poet's reply is that he calls to everyone to carry all their joys and sorrows lightly, in a rhythmic measure. Poetry puts to tune even the business of life, and stirs the life within to respond to the call of life without. But why try to solve the dilemma: it is sufficient that the music haunts and makes man more deeply aware that he exists.

In the drama of the Seasons the mask of the Old Man, Winter, is pulled off and the form of Spring is revealed in all its beauty : The old is ever new. Tagore says that he has stolen this plot from the lyrical drama of the World Poet—God's creation. In the play THE BAMBOO, THE BIRD, THE BLOSSOMING CHAMPAK and The YOUTH—everyone sings. It is as if their very spirit and soul, their very essence, is singing—it is the unseen urge of new life towards light: It is the call of the Soul of Existence.

The poet sees the very dust of earth tingling with youth and the very earth and water ever striving to be new. He sees Play everywhere, in every movement of Nature and Man.

> It is Play, to fight and toss,
>
> between life and death;
> It is Play that flashes in the laughter of light
> in the finite heart;
> It roars in the wind,
> and surges in the sea............
> Play blooms in flower
> and ripens in fruit
> In the sunshine of eternal youth.
> Play bursts up in the blood-red fire,
> and licks into ashes the decaying and the dead.

Time itself is play, its only object is Pas-time. Then what is Work ? Work is the dust raised by the passing of the Time. And behind this work and play

> The Piper pipes in the centre, hidden from sight.

SACRIFICE AND OTHER PLAYS

Important plays in this collection are:

1. *Sanyasi, or the Ascetic*
2. *Malini*
3. *Sacrifice*
4. *The King and the Queen*—all of them more or less symbolical.

SANYASI is a drama of conflict between denial of life and its affirmation. The Sanyasi, prior to his becoming an ascetic, was lashed by empty desires and pleasures into tears and repentance which made him renounce this world and go out in search of the Infinite. Now he has taken shelter in "the castle of the Infinite", where he sits "chanting the incantation of nothingness", and ultimately feels himself "alone in the heart of the infinite annihilation". Secure in the stainless unity of the Infinite and in its light of reason, pure and bright, free from fear and desire, he lets himself go out into 'the kingdom of lies'—the active world of form and colour. In this world he comes into contact with Vasanti,—symbolizing life, love and beauty, who freely says: "To me, things that are beautiful are the keys to all that I have not seen and not known." The magic of her charm works upon him, and at moments he recalls,

> "......and I sat with someone, the memory of whose face is in that setting star of the evening.''

The truth of life gradually settles upon his soul, he is converted, and declares :

> "I am free from the bodiless chain of Nay. I am free among things and forms and purpose. The finite is the true infinite and love knows its truth.''

His last words with which the play concludes are : "She can never be dead." The spirit of life and love and beauty can never be killed, despite conservatism, convention, violence and terror; the princess must be married to the prince; the love in a person must, through the love of a person, find its home in the love of the Deity.

MALINI is an uncertain play. 'It is very difficult to be quite sure—so many interpretations are possible.' Yet the ineffable in life and in the lonely heart of man that pervades the play like soft air cannot be doubted. Malini, the moving spirit of the play, is a simple, young girl,—daughter of the king; she is the 'beautiful dawn', 'a pure flame of fire', 'not the bright star of the sky but the sweet flower that blossoms on earthly soil',—the embodiment of pure life-consciousness. A moment comes in her life when she seems to hear a tumult in the heavens, and feels an unknown pain, 'there is an anguish in my heart, I know not for what.' She is restless; she must go out to know the secret. She prepares to go, but she feels, 'The night is dark, and the boat is moored in heaven.' She asks, 'Where is the captain who shall take the wanderers home ?'—and with great confidence in herself she says : 'I feel I know the path, and the boat will thrill with life at my touch.'

She leaves the cramped, closed house of her father, the king, and comes out to meet the world and its people beneath whose tumult and conflict she seems to feel the stirrings of a Soul, a primal rhythm flowing out into movement and dynamis. In every age the primal urge of life-consciousness rises up against the falsehoods of the musty old books and worm-eaten creeds; it rises against the monotony of life under a social order in which gold is the objective and measure of all values; it also rises above the mind's own blind certitude of stupidity and the cramping, narrowing selfhood. Man must feel like the young lad Supriya in the play who, confessing to the overpowering presence of Malini, said:

> "My faith has come to me perfected in the form of that woman. ‡......I have read, by the help of the light of those eyes, the ancient book of creation, and I have known that true faith is there, where there is man, where there is love......I accepted the bond of this faith which reveals the infinite in man, when I set my eyes upon that face full of light and love and peace of hidden wisdom."

And if Supriya is murdered in the end by Kemankar, the upholder of orthodoxy, it does not matter, for the life-spirit continues moving on in an infinite pursuit. To open out to a wider consciousness even for a while is the thing: and there seems to ring the central note of the play.

SACRIFICE—The play is the expression of the poet's feeling against bigotry of all Kind, which by its very nature begets bloodshed, violence and war—makes brother kill brother. Man loses his humanity in his pride, whereas the truth of existence is in the heart's simplicity and kindness. The force of arms or the power and pride of position only reveals man's hollowness. Here is a cultured sensibility expressing disgust for cruelty or for anything that cramps life.

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‡ The idea invites comparison with Shakespeare's which, though coming from an emotion of different quality—more 'vital' or human than spiritual—, is nonetheless equally intense:

"From women's eyes this doctrine I dervie;
They are the ground, the books, the academes,
From whence doth spring true Promethean fire."

(From Love's Labour Lost)

The play's main dramatic interest lies in the conflict between bigotry and grace, between duty and love, which is reflected in the character of Jaising, the adopted son of Raghupati, the bigot. Here are two pictures of the conflict:

> Jaising:—To kill is no sin, to kill brother is no sin, to kill king is no sin.—Where do you go, my brother? To the fair at Nishipur ? There the women are to dance ? Oh, this world is pleasant and the dancing limbs of the girls are beautiful. In what careless merriment the crowds flew through the roads, making the sky ring with their laughter and songs. I will follow them.

Here destruction is in grip with creation: repression with freedom. Take another picture in which bigoted duty is in grip with love:

> Jaising:—No, Master do not tell me of love. Let me think only of duty. Love, like the green grass, and the trees, and life's music, is only for the surface of the world. It comes and vanishes like a dream. But underneath is duty, like the rude layer of stone, like a huge load that nothing can move.

King Govind (symbolizing the voice of grace) forbids shedding of blood in God's temple; the queen's offerings are sent back from there. Unaware of the royal order she asks the king to punish the culprit who has sent back her offerings and says :

> " If your kindness hampers you, leave the punishment in my hands. Only, tell me, who is he ?
>
> Govind—It is I, my queen. My crime was in nothing else but having given you pain.

Firmness for truth combined at the same time with the heart's civility and love could go no deeper. It is perfection of culture. Only a poet could know it and express it so simply and easily.

Raghupati, the chief priest, and his followers, the king's brother, the general, the Queen and others are bent upon sacrifice. The Mother Goddess wants royal blood, and blood of young boys and goats. But to Govind, the king, the true Mother had come in a girl's disguise and told him that 'blood she cannot suffer'. It was Aparna the poor beggar girl who herself repeated God's voice of love but nobody listened to it. When such a thing happens the free flow of life ceases, the heart's joys dry up and there is bloodshed. Govind, the King, turns away from Gunavati the queen whom pride and folly and selfhood possess; and Raghupati, whose bigotry makes him blind to the still small voice of humanity in Aparna, loses his son Jaising and all charm in life. The world has gone dark, desolation is complete. But Jaising, a wondrous creation issuing out of the flaming heart of the poet, kills himself to kill the falsehood that sucks the life-blood of man. He sacrifices himself (God himself must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all creation) to save all and restore grace in the life of everyone in the play. Each one's heart opens to the spirit of existence, the queen gets back her king and Raghupati, Aparna, who floods his life with happiness by calling him 'Father' and reviving in him the warm sanctities of human love.

God's voice of love is ever ringing in the world but man in his greed and pride refuses to hear it, forsakes the straight path and fills the emptiness with stony images of delusion—of false gods. But cruelty and falsehood cannot continue to stalk the earth for long; the true Mother Goddess bursts her cruel prison of stone, and comes back to the woman's heart; grace is restored in Tagore's dramatic world after tragic suspense and sacrifice.

THE KING AND THE QUEEN — The play has struck me as an unrelieved tragedy. When love forsakes life, its (life's) fire might turn into passion for war burning all into ashes. The queen forsook the king disregarding the latter's love and went to join her brother, the prince of Kashmir, to war against the rebels. The king losing his love and consequently his interest in life also takes to war with a vengeance and the result is that the country turns into a desolate heap of the innocent ones killed. The queen's defeated brother commits suicide to save self-pride just when his beloved in bridal dress was listening to bridal music. The queen herself lays down her life. The tragedy occurred only because the queen hadn't realized that she and the king were not mere king and queen but more than that they were lovers. It is a drama of human passions built round the poet's scorn of governments, their wars and glory which only give rise to callousness defeating the very purpose of life which lies in the awakening of love.

THE WATERFALL

It is a play in which the very breath of Tagore's land has found dramatic expression in the voice of the different classes mingling on the highway. Influenced evidently by the Indian movement for freedom, the play is socio-political, allegorically presenting Tagore's deepest convictions on modern politics, the system of education and the place of machinery in human society. The oppressors may, with the aid of army and machinery, reduce the life of people to slavish acquiescence, but the stream of life would not respect the barrage for long. Similarly, man's self-awareness may be dimmed and reduced to mere mechanical response, but it too must, in the long run, stir for freer, higher expression;—for, ultimately, both life and awareness are exalted dimensions of the Infinite itself, which defies all restraint. It is the call of the soul of existence which furnishes the undertone of the play.

RED OLEANDERS

The significance of this play lies in the realisation of the secret of life—Joy, which is the rhythm of existence, the dance rhythm of all. It is this rhythm which lightens the enormous weight of 'matter' and to which stars and planets, like so many youthful choristers, go dancing about. If one likes to hear, its call is ever there :

> Come, O come away !
> The earth's mantle of dust is filled with

ripe corn !
O the Joy ! the Joy !

And further :

"I love, I love" is the cry
that breaks out—
from the bosom of earth and water;
The sky broods like an aching heart,
the horizon is tender like
eyes misted with tears."

The poet has seen where the reality of man as man lies. While to the animal belongs only the pain of desire for the near, to man belongs the sorrow for the far. The essential spirit of his existence is spontaneous joy, intense love and yearning for the far off Beyond. Nandini, the central figure in the play, symbolizes this spirit. She moves about with her wristlets of red oleanders—flowers expressive of Nature's joy—stirring up everything with her love, and alluring all with her fugitiveness. But in modern times this spirit is being constantly baffled by Science, which cares only to know and has no patience with things that can only be felt, and under which "the hidden mystery of life wrenched by me (Science) bewails its torn ties;" subdued by crass materialism with its greed for gold and power and consequent conflict, discontent, suffering and overawing tyranny of safety, that is, fear of social insecurity, and by a repressive heartless system whose instruments are the Governor, his headmen, his spies, his Gosain, the religious preacher hired to silence the mine-workers who have already been reduced by the system from men to mere numbers. The surprising efficiency of this system is that it has succeeded in covering with a network of intricate patterns the face of real God—the God of Beauty, of Love, of Joy. But the spirit of life cannot be repressed for ever. Nandini's husband Ranjan, the rebel, who had resolved to bring God's own laughter to the labourers is murdered by the Governor's men; but the workers hear Nandini's call from afar; they revolt against the system and its false God. The network is ultimately torn to shreds, and the real king (the Godhead) who had been hiding so long breaks the Flagstaff, the holiest symbol of the crass system's divinity, comes out into the open, calling out for Nandini and following her. Victory to the joy of Existence !

It would be of interest to know Tagore's own interpretation* of the play. He says: In *Red Oleanders*, there are certain underlying principles at work, principles which we can quite easily recognize in our daily existence if we choose to look for one moment under the surface. The habit of greed—greed for things, for power, for facts, with all the ramifications that greed is able to set up between man and man—is arrayed against the explosive force of human sympathy, of neighbourliness, of fellowship and of love, the force which we may term good. Good is here arrayed against the dehumanizing force of mammon, of selfishness, of evil; of that which separates us from our fellows against that which cements us together, of that which, because it divides us, is untruth, is a lie. Only in so far as he recognizes this truth, has man succeeded in reaching the peak upon which the human race now stands, whilst the tiger, a solitary wandering unit, still prowls the jungle alone. "The background, then, is a world based upon the principle that each must fight the other, oppress or be oppressed, in order not merely that the ordinary simple needs of life may be satisfied, but that piles of accumulation may be set up. This is a world where, with every available means in his power, the Great King exploits the resources of the underworld, of nature, of the mine, of science and of human physique and intelligence, using all the weapons of organisation and the elaborate machinery of a highly centralized bureaucracy in order to add to his wealth. This wealth he measures in gold, or in facts, or in human bodies, so that men are men no longer but numbers. Into a loveless world, a world where men have ceased even to be civil,...... comes Nandini, the embodiment of that light that is beauty and love......Matched with Ranjan, the spirit of joy in work, together they embody the spirit of love before which the discord of greed is scattered as under a spell. Linked in this harmony of beauty they walk fearlessly into this world of getting, and, being independent of it, they break down its barriers, even though in the process they are broken themselves,—but such sacrifice is the price which must always be paid in the effort to break down the wall of darkness, of untruth and to flood the world with light. In the face of this combination of simplicity, the king, enclosed in his pride of empire, in his accumulation of wealth, of things, finds a touch of that happiness which he had lost,……is dazzled and confounded by the beams of a beauty that warms and embraces everything under its cloak of human affection and sympathy……Like the red oleander flower happiness too must be the fruit of love,……of human sympathy and consideration, and of human sacrifice in the cause of that unity which is truth."

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* See "Visvabharati Quarterly," Vol. XVII, Nov. 1951-Jan. 1952.

THE ESSENTIAL IN TAGORE'S DRAMAS

Tagore's dramas are poetico-mystic. This does not mean that there is anything esoteric about them. They come direct from the poet's heart and appeal direct to the elements of life, love and joy that are all human, elements that are also in nature and ultimately also at the root of All-Existence. Neither are they mere lyric or symbolic effusions and not dramas in the proper sense of the term. They are dramas; they have plot, characterization (archetypal and symbolic but not without individual distinction) and dialogue; contemporary socio-economic questions and crisis in civilization make their background solid; and in expert hands they are eminently actable. Above all, their centre is 'conflict', which raises dramatic emotions and round which all good drama moves; but the dramatic intensity is mainly of the inner heart, not of the outer world of action.

There are two planes of conflict: the conflict between those individuals who despite varying shades of character, generally stand for freedom, love and compassion in life and those who represent orthodoxy, conservatism, bigotry, formalism, whether social, economic, political or religious; and the conflict, which is more central and universal, between the soul's assertion, by virtue of its own nature, for expression in joy and love, and the forces of reaction in the society promoting despair, poverty, terror and death on one hand, and man's own narrow, selfish and crass materialistic tendency to shut his senses and awareness out from the touch of the wider existence on the other. But besides these dramatic elements, it is the unity of a mood or the reality of an idea that, in the case of Tagore, controls the building up of his dramas and underlies them all. The one central mood or idea that inspires and informs Tagore's plays is the apprehension—symbolically speaking—of the little spark of divinity within the heart of man, craving for self-expression in joy,—asserting, in the face of the force of the inconscient, the 'Tamasic', that it cannot be blotted out. And inasmuch as this 'idea' is not a mere intellectual concept or a sentimental make-up, but a truth of existence felt at that depth of the soul where the universal trysts with the individual,the Tagorean drama is more than a drama of passions at physical or lower emotive level,or of ideas or a drama merely embodying a cult of beauty or art.

CHAPTER TEN

WHAT HAPPENS TO ME WHEN I READ TAGORE

Under the impact of Tagore's poetic word a sudden realization dawns upon me that I exist, and also that there is a world existing around me. Didn't I exist before I read a poem of Tagore's ? I did exist; but the moment I read his poem I became what I wasn't before : I became more deeply and intimately aware of myself. An animal exists but I doubt if it knows or feels or thinks that it exists; it is perhaps the special privilege of man alone to know, think and feel like that, which he does more vividly and more intensely under the transforming influence of poetry. It is like Wordsworth receiving from the primrose by the river's brim thoughts too deep for tears or like Keats growing intensely aware of the sparrow—that came to his window—and taking part in its existence. So what happens is that I come to possess Wordsworth's and Keats's intense awareness of the primrose and the sparrow, become intensely aware of Tagore's boatman, his cloud, his Cabulliwallah, and through them of my own being. I get as it were a sense of the density of my life. Discordances die out and a strange sensation seizes of my body, restoring 'the hour of glory in the grass, splendour in the flower'—restoring the hour when even the dust of the streets seems as pleasing as gold to the eyes. I am given to realize that

> A world of lovelier forms lies near to us
> Where undisguised by earth's deforming sight
> All shapes are beautiful and all things true; *

given to apprehend that there is somewhere a stratum of harmony in existence, a world-transcending sweetness within us. The apprehension deepens, a calm descends all passions spent, I feel myself drawn closer to the heart of existence, I begin to sense as if some one were standing and staring at me, which so surprises my sense that I seem nothing. My heart becomes humbly resonant with prayer to the Vast one:

> Cast me not away, draw me to thy feet at the
> day's end, for thou art all I have.

What more is wanted ? The poet's function is fulfilled inasmuch as by the power of his poetry, to use the words of Walter de la Mare, 'Serenity returns to the troubled mind, the world crumbles, loveliness shines like flowers after rain, and the further reality is once more charged with mystery.' Anybody with positivistic or pragmatistic preoccupations might cancel this whole talk as airy stuff, as vague, contentless effusion, but all those who have even a modicum of sensitivity, unspoiled by 'fashionable' thinking, could hear in it the deep voice of life.

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* Sri Aurobindo.

We have only to thank ourselves if we miss to feel the touch of the Beloved.

Tagore's poetry allures me in a strange way for while it sings directly of the tenderness of the grass in the forest walk, of the freshness of the spring and the sweetness of flowers, of the patter of rain during the night, of the tiller tilling the hard soil and the boatman rowing the boat, of Nature's revenges on the ascetic, of the pangs of love in separation and of its satisfaction in union, of all that is familiar in human life—its natural sorrow, loss or pain—it leads us quietly and unawares from the here to the beyond, from the face to the feeling: It burns with the heat of life's passions but emits at the same time the fragrance of life's essence. It moves us to sense

> A distant dearness in the hill
> A secret sweetness in the stream,

despite life's daily drudgery, since it elevates our consciousness to a height where the actual easily passes into transcendence: It makes us stand in 'the overflowing solitude where all things are seen as by their creator.'

And inspite of the fact that even the most subjective of poetry may not entirely escape conditioning by time, space and history, I have felt that like many a hymn of the Vedas and the Upanishads, Tagore's best poetry strikes us as pure utterance coming direct from a universal heart, raising neither ideals nor concepts but only stirring the depths of our being. We may even forget that it is Tagore's. And still we may feel here is a note distilled out of the soul-song of the India of the ages. It is very simple, very direct, very human and gives us at the same time to feel the presence of an unknown Something:

> All of a sudden, then, I discover the Unknown
> Hid deep within me.
> And lose myself in the fathomless depths
> Of a feeling whose joy is new
> Each moment.

Reading Tagore's poetry I have felt that it was vain to seek or expect in it any final answers to your soul's questionings, any solution of life's riddles, or explanation of the mystery of being or God. His poetry wouldn't give it to you. Great consolation and moral strength from it you might draw as many soldiers, during the First Great War, did in the most trying hours of their life; but set message ?—no; never—"a poet .was in his greatest height not where he leaves a message, but where he creates true art and produces joy",* so said Tagore himself. And yet people might never tire of drawing out morals or messages. They point out, even rightly enough, that Tagore's poetry bears the message of unity of life, of universal love, of making science and machine subservient to human good, of the need of reawakening and placing above mechanist abstraction man's sense of feeling himself as himself, of going back to Nature and securing through her the sweetness and harmony of existense. It is also pointed out that 'the present day difficulty in the world of thought, namely, the dualism between God and the individual self, a trouble to Platonic and Scholastic tradition and sore in the contemporary Existential philosophy, one that has torn present-day thought between rational pessimism (of Russell and Sartre) and irrational optimism (of Kierkogaard) can be dissolved if we listen to Tagore's all-reconciling voice', at once deep and sweet, as in the meaningful lines:

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* From a lecture on Bankimchandra delivered in Calcutta in 1923. Quoted by Dasgupta in his, *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Philosopher*, P. 183.

> Where can I meet thee unless in this my home made thine ?
> Where can I join thee unless in this my work transformed into thine ?

But a message given and remaining unheard or unfruitful counts for nothing. In this respect History is bound to record more of Marx whose teachings have actually effected mighty and far-reaching changes in the world, and posed a serious challenge to its sense of complacency. I don't think Tagore's message has done any such thing. Despite this, if you couldn't rest satisfied unless you had sought out a message in Tagore's poetry, then I could do no better than quote in this connection his own words which, to me at least, seem to embody a great lesson about this three-score-and-ten span of human life but which you, as a moral-seeker, might disapprove. Issuing from the depth and poignancy of his life's experience, the words are:

> The emptiness left by easy joys, untasted, is ever growing in my life. · And the day may come when I shall feel that, could I but have the past back, I would strive no more after the unattainable, but drain to the full these little, unsought, everyday joys which life offers*:

Words fully in tune with the spirit of that Prince of Poets, Shakespeare, for whom too, the love of pleasure, if it was 'generous and sensitive and quick to catch reflections, was hardly distinguishable from wisdom.' So, days pass, life's business goes on, and sometimes musical strains of the poet-singer fall upon the ear, when moments of plodding for the while are turned into moments of grace: As C. Day Lewis puts it :

> Over dark wood rises one dawn felicitous,
> Bright through her awakened shadows fall her crystal
> Cadenzas, and once for all the wood is quickened,
> So our joys visit us and it suffices.

Let these little joys visit us, the mortals, and it would suffice. All other messages seem to be mere high-sounding platitudes. It is not belittling Tagore or detracting from his significance as social thinker and world-teacher; but if one really and truly wanted to feel the poet's real life-throb, one could do it only in his native propensity for creative joy and his self-abandon in the world-heart's rhythm. Tagore, essentially, remains a purposeless singer, for which his own testament is there which he wrote in the evening of his life and which is full of the poignancy of a heart gazing fixedly on the panorama of life left behind. He writes:

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* *Glimpses of Bengal*, pp. 81-82.

> "In the course of my life I have been attracted to a variety of activities. But the inmost me is not to be found in any of these. At the end of the journey I can see the curve of my life a little more clearly. Looking back the only thing of which I feel fairly certain is that I am a poet."

He adds:

> "I do not claim to be a theologian, a leader of men, a moral or religious preceptor......The messengers of Truth's white Radiance, who purify earth, air and water, who guide men to the paths of peace, I honour them,—and I know that I am not of their company. But when that one Raidance throws itself out joyously into the Spectrum of this universal movement, then and there I find my vocation as a poet."

He further adds :

> "If I have been able to furnish a few toys to the world's playhouse I shall not care for their preservation in perpetuity. The potsherd will one day be consigned to the scrapheap, anyway. Enough if I have been able to breathe life into these toys of time and charge them with the rapture of Bliss at the heart of all that is. I ask for nothing more."*

Tagore, in the most terrible, the most real moments of his life, gets into touch with the heart of Existence, its beauty and love, and with the unheard rumblings of the Cosmos and the fathomless silence of the Night; and God knows what unknown fingers suddenly strike his heartstrings that melodies unsought for start pouring out,—rhythms and tunes seeming to precede all thought and feeling. Verily, he is a poet—the master of Vak,—of Speech. And I believe that it would be his poetry alone that will, by the transcendence it achieves through the music and love and pathos of existence, continue down the ages to attract men from far and near:

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* For these passages I am indebted to Dr. Sisir Kumar Ghose's translation of Rabindranath Tagore's testament "I am a Poet."

> **Absent-minded I sing, someone hears or not hears,**
> **Someone may remember, someone may draw nigh.**

The End.